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Soul 2 Soul II

Women, Spirituality and Health

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Soul to Soul

Soul to Soul now, we walk this road now,
Through triumph and through tragedy;
Soul to Soul now, we walk as one now,
Through struggle onto victory.

Soul to Soul now, we weave this web now,
Of connection and of family;
Soul to Soul now, we guard this web now,
Of protection and of unity.

This Spirit is calling us, calling us, calling us onward,
To live in Her justice, Her truth,
Her love and Her infinite peace;
The Spirit keeps calling us, calling us, calling us upward,
To reach for the courage, the clarity, and strength to follow
wherever, wherever She leads.

Soul to Soul now, we speak our truths now,
With courage and with dignity;
Soul to Soul now, we become our truths now,
Through the Spirit who will set us free.

Greta Rosenberger is a PSR graduate and has been a director of Catholic faith formation. She originally wrote *Soul to Soul* for the 1998 **Soul to Soul: Women, Religion, and the 21st Century Conference**. We were happy to have Greta rewrite parts of the song and perform it for CWR's 30th Anniversary Celebration which was part of the **Soul 2 Soul II: Women, Spirituality and Health Conference**.

List of Contributors

Jean Shinoda Bolen, MD is a Jungian analyst, psychiatrist, clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco, and author of numerous best selling books, including *Goddesses in Everywoman*, *Close to the Bone*, and *The Millioneth Circle*. She has been an advocate for women, women's issues, and ethics in psychiatry, and a board member of the MS Foundation for Women. *A Soul 2 Soul II Key Note Presenter.*

Darlene Cohen, M.A., LMT, began sitting at the San Francisco Zen Center in 1970 and was ordained as a zen priest in 1999. While living at Green Gulch Farm she developed rheumatoid arthritis, a painful and crippling immune system disease. Her approach to healing has focused on the synchronization of mind and body through meditation and mindfulness. Currently she sees private clients with chronic illness, and gives workshops, lectures and pain seminars at medical facilities and meditation centers throughout the US. Her two books, *ARTHRITIS: Everyday Exercises for the Body and Mind* and *Finding a Joyful Life in the Heart of Pain* are in bookstores. *A Soul 2 Soul II Workshop Presenter.*

Anita L. DeFrantz, a member of the 1976 and 1980 US Olympic teams, an attorney, an vice president of the International Olympic Committee, and is the president of the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles. DeFrantz has been named one of the "100 Most Powerful People in Sports" by The Sporting News nine times. DeFrantz serves the US Olympic Committee Board of Directors, and will be on the International Olympic Committee until 2032. *A Soul 2 Soul II Key Note Presenter.*

Mary Pat Henehan is a licensed marriage and family therapist and has a psychotherapy private practice. She teaches in the School of Public Health at Saint Louis University, as adjunct faculty. She is writing a book with Haworth Press titled: *New Women's Narratives: Integrating Spirit and Psyche*. She has taught at the college level for over twelve years and has been in health care for over thirty-eight years. She has a Doctor of Ministry from Eden Theological Seminary, a Masters degree from Saint Louis University, a Masters in Public Health from the University of Michigan, and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. *A Soul 2 Soul II Workshop Presenter.*

Christina Hutchins is a Ph.D. candidate in Interdisciplinary Studies at the Graduate Theological Union and teaches part time at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. She holds an M.Div. from Harvard Divinity School and is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Her dissertation utilizes process philosophy and insights from feminist and queer theories to explore the contemporary ecclesial discourse on sexuality as a rupture that opens new possibilities for the philosophy of religion. She is also a poet, and in addition to a chapbook and CD, *Collecting Light* (Acacia Books, 1999), her poems have been widely published in literary journals and anthologies. *A Soul 2 Soul II Workshop Presenter.*

Dr. Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan is Executive Director of the Center for Women and Religion, an Assistant Professor of Theology and Womanist Studies at the Graduate Theological Union, and a minister in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. She has written a number of books including: *Refiner's Fire: A Religious Engagement of Violence*, *The Undivided Soul: Helping Congregations Connect Body & Spirit*, and *Misbegotten Anguish: A Theology and Ethics of Violence* forthcoming, 2001. She is an Associate Editor for *Semeia*, an experimental journal in biblical criticism, and is Series Editor for the Pilgrim Press Womanist Perspective Series.

Ruth Leshner is a Ph.D. student at the Graduate Theological Union with an interest in Christian Spirituality and Interdisciplinary Studies. She holds an M.Div. from the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, has pastored in Illinois, and is currently pastor of caring ministries at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Lafayette, CA. She has recently joined the Steering Committee of CWR. *A Soul 2 Soul II Worship Presenter.*

Dr. Earthlyn Marselean Manuel is writer, artist and teacher living in Oakland, California. She is a graduate of the Women's Spirituality program at the California Institute of Integral Studies. She is the author of *Black Angel Cards: A Soul Revival Guide for Black Women* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1999). *A Soul 2 Soul II Workshop Participant.*

Susan Sered is Director of the Religion, Health and Healing Research Initiative at Harvard University's Center for the Study of World Religions, and Associate Professor of Anthropology at Bar Ilan University (Israel). Her most recent publication is a book entitled *What Makes Women Sick?: Maternity, Modesty and Militarism in Israeli Society*. She is currently engaged in a study of

religious healing in urban communities in the United States.

Priscilla Stuckey, who received her PhD from the Graduate Theological Union, is a scholar of gender and religion as well as a book editor and writing consultant. She is working on a trade book that will highlight the profound grip of gender myths on our daily lives, showing how it is not the differences in our bodies but the ideas we hold about those bodies that make up the great divide of gender. She is a CWR Research Associate.

Pat McHenry Sullivan, president of Visionary Resources (510-530-0284), writes and speaks about meaningful work and life. You can access some of her "Vision and Values" columns from the San Francisco Chronicle or her "Practical Spirituality" columns from her website, www.visionary-resources.com. *A Soul 2 Soul II Workshop Presenter.*

Julia Watts is a poet, writer, activist, and seminary student at Starr King School for the Ministry. Before coming to seminary, she worked as an anti-oppression facilitator, developing trainings for people interested in personal transformation and social change. An eclectic Pagan living with a disability, she is passionate about queer spirituality, disability rights, creative expression, interfaith justice work, and everyday liberation. *A Soul 2 Soul II Workshop Presenter.*

A Note from the Managing Editor

Kenneth I. Rowe

This volume of the Journal has been a joy and a struggle to produce. The Journal's two key disciplines of reference, Religious Studies and Women's Studies are by nature interdisciplinary. Add to that mix the various disciplines represented by the authors in this volume has meant a variety of styles, voices, and citations. This diversity shows in the vibrancy and richness of subject matter found at the Soul 2 Soul II conference. Unfortunately, this diversity has also affected the publishing schedule of this volume. The timing of the Soul 2 Soul II conference for October of the publication year was the initial cause of delay. We are well away on plans for the next two volumes and have clarified our style requirements.

Meditative Musings: On Women, Spirituality, and Health

Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, Ph.D.

This 18th edition of the Journal for the Center for Women and Religion, an academic program unit of the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, echoes the concerns and powerful discussions convened during the conference honoring the Center's 30th Anniversary celebration: "Soul 2 Soul II: Women, Spirituality, and Health," October 12-14, 2000. We are honored to present this document and in introducing the volume, share with you some of the thinking that led to this subject matter.

The Fetzer Institute, a nonprofit private foundation that supports research, education, and service programs exploring the integral relationships among body, mind, and spirit, notes that "With the very survival of people and the planet at risk, we hear the cry for a conscious integration of spirit into all aspects of our lives." The Fetzer Institute insists that "the health of our civilization depends continually on the enlivened wholeness and spiritual freedom of its citizens. We cannot address the larger issues without simultaneously freeing our own inner lives. True freedom arises as we become conscious of the relationship between the inner life of mind and spirit and the outer life of service." The "Soul 2 Soul II: Women, Spirituality, and Health Conference" celebrated premier standards of health, science, and theological education, rooted in many of the great spiritual traditions. Critical to the design and goals of the conference was the notion that we wanted to enhance our inner capacity for wholeness and freedom, and to bolster our outer capacity to love and serve. Foundations, institutes, and collaborative partnerships across the United States have started to grapple with the integration of human life to enhance a better quality of individual and communal life together. The Center currently has relationships with the Bay Area Faith and Health Consortium, sponsored by the Pacific School of Religion, and the School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley. To be fully human, in part, means to deal with holistic health, and to divine the various layers that must be reck-

oned with: physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, financial. To be healthy is an experience of justice. Many women, in particular, do not know this gift of justice, for they live the life of oppression and abuse.

Studies have documented that being female is often an experience of oppression, particularly for minority or under served populations. Within employment, politics, and faith, women comprise 51% of the participants but less than 10% of those in authority. Neglect, abuse, and denial intensify the negative conditions of women's lives. Ivone Gebara, Brazilian ecofeminist theologian, in her *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*, 1999, argues that theological connections regarding the poor and issues of environment and access have been unattended. Many women do not have prenatal care and thus now only is their health at stake, but also that of their unborn infant. Many women with fixed incomes do not have health insurance, so they do not have access to simple procedures and the care that could prevent later catastrophic disease. Some women have access to health care as pertains to the relationship between their bodies and illness or disease, but their mental, emotional, and spiritual health is under assault.

Many women are in continuous mental and emotional dis-ease because of the gross levels of stress they face daily. Many single mothers have to engage multiple parental tasks and have too few dollars to stretch in too many places. Often women with financial means as so stress because of outrageous expectations by others and themselves. They are always having to overachieve. Some women suffer from mental and emotional illness and anguish. There is still so much stigma attached to these kinds of diseases that often women go untreated or self-medicate. Other women are under great duress because of their belief systems. They think they have to stay in a horrible marriage/partner relationship. They have been made to feel so ashamed, that they could not imagine leaving this bad relationship. Often times their religious leaders have encouraged them to stay in these situations and women have had no relief or peace until the abuse was so great that they lost their lives – all in the so-called name of love. Sometimes these women stay in these relationships because of their belief that this is what they deserve and they worship and honor a Spirit or God that condones such oppression. For surely if a woman is to be subservient to a partner or husband, then if that subservience is accompanied by battering, isn't it justified? "I must have done something to deserve this." "I made a mistake and my partner/spouse just got a little upset." If a person has a spiritual discipline or prays to a being that in her/his mind allows for her/him to be beat, what does that say about religion, philosophy, and faith? Is it a crime to live a balanced, healthy life?

Few cultural role models and resources exist, thus theological studies must

create an intellectual, institutional culture that resists systemic oppression. Such studies, themselves are far from perfect. Many students attend seminary and never have to take a class from a woman or from a racial/ethnic faculty person. While seminaries have been training women for congregational and religious leadership for over three decades, only about 10% of all Protestant churches have women in senior pastoral leadership positions. Many denominations have women as lay leaders, but do not ordain women. In wrestling with themes and topics, we were compelled to focus on the health and spirituality of women, realizing that women's issues are not just women's issues, they are human, personal, societal, and communal issues. We also wanted to raise the level of consciousness about the import of health and spirituality as a facet of nurturing excellence among leadership. In honoring the leadership, we were also aware of the rich history of the Center and its founding as a move toward health and wholeness.

From time immemorial to that of Abraham and Esther, Mohammed, Buddha, Jesus, and other religious leaders, social activists, and prophetic voices, to our own times, where women and men, like Marie Curie, Indira Ghandi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin King, Malcolm X, Coretta King and Hillary Clinton have accepted God's call on their lives to serve, nurture, and guide humanity in courses of action to the betterment of our world. We celebrated the persons, dreams, hopes, and possibilities that served as the 1970 catalyst for the founding of the Office of Women's Affairs, later named the Center for Women and Religion.

Initially, the energy was spent on finding and maintaining a psychological and physical space, first an office at the LeConte Avenue GTU administrative office and space for a women's center in Pacific School of Religion housing, where gatherings could occur in a hospitable space set aside for women's concerns; a place where students could take courses where they could pursue questions and issues arising from women's experiences in the church. A second emphasis was financial, spiritual, and psychological support. The shoestring budget with four quarter time assistants came from monies from GTU-related and other groups from around the country. Speaking out was a third major emphasis where women could challenge religious institutional patterns of exclusion and injustice against women and other groups.

Today many of our issues are changed, some are the same. Thus during the conference, we celebrated the lives and gifts of the many women and men who have helped the Center reach 30 years of age. We particularly honored the late Ida Thornton, with the creation of the Ida Thornton Endowment, established by her family. The new endowment fund in progress celebrates Ida's grace and compassion, her deep care for people and women all over the

world, her long time caring for the Center from the beginning. Ida symbolizes the gifts and graces of the women who have worked and those who continue to work with the Center. With the Soul to Soul Conference we signaled a celebration of interfaith, ecumenical and consortial community building. We honored the great religious traditions of the world and the hope for transforming lives and the quest for peace. We celebrated a new day where women and men can communicate and work together as God, Spirit, or a philosophical discipline has called us, for the 21st Century. This conference launched a heightened solidarity and commitment at the Center for excellence, bridge building on holy hill and the Bay Area. This conference celebrated the best of who we are and the best we hope to be.

The conference provided a forum for networking and relationship building, which fosters conversations on issues and skill-building to enhance the capacity of individuals and communities to create healthy people, healthy communities. The conference format included plenary sessions, workshops, and a health fair. The plenary sessions provided information and inspired and encouraged participants to assess their lifestyle and know their options for change. The opening plenary involved local participants, especially a mass choir made up of members from various permanent faith-based organizations and churches in the Bay Area, and a premier of an orchestral setting of poems by a scholar, Marsha Falk from the East Bay, directed by the late composer, Peter Bellinger who set Marsha's work to music. During that same event, Jean Kilbourne, Ed.D., award-winning documentary filmmaker, and lecturer on images of women in advertising provided the opening keynote address: "Deadly Persuasion: Advertising and Addiction."

Other keynote presentations included the following: Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., Jungian analyst, psychiatrist, clinical professor of psychiatry at University of San Francisco Medical Center continued our plenary presentations with her lecture, "Illness as a Mythic Descent and Turning Point." An award winning panel with journalist Laura Fraser, author of *Losing It* and Michelle Lehwica, Th.D., author of *Starving for Salvation* engaged the audience after presenting discussion on "Facing Food: Denial of Health and spirituality." Maryam Rashada, LICSW, led a stirring conversation on "Spirituality, Sexuality, and Sensibility . The Road Less Traveled," which was followed by Spirituality Interactives. Participants had an opportunity to "embody" their own sense of spiritual wellness at variety of meditation, prayer, and other practice stations from a variety of faith traditions and non-denominational philosophies. Anita DeFrantz, First Vice President of the International Olympic Committee, President of the Amateur Athletic Association in Los Angeles, juxtapose the importance of sport and wellness. Our Anniversary celebration culmi-

nated with an interfaith worship service, where bell hooks, Ph.D., cultural critic and author of *All About Love* spoke on "Dwelling in Love."

The workshops during the conference were 90 minute interactive conversational sessions that focused on issues, skills, or community building. Specifically, the workshops focused on foundations for healthy living, spiritual practices, self-healing, and creating healthy communities. The health fair had both a display of books related to the intersection between good health practices and spiritual development, and practitioners provided tips and brochures on better health care practices. Hundreds of scholars, clergy, athletes, activists, and organizers who work in the areas of women, health, spirituality, and social justice participated.

The Soul 2 Soul II: Women, Spirituality, and Health" Conference was a venue of support, scholarship, and ritual that served as a catalyst to help women deal with all facets of their lives. The conference provided various languages, skills, and practices to help them better articulate the matters of health and faith with other women and men in a manner that helps build healthy communities. Many went away with skills and attitudes that will have a beneficial affect on their quality of life and self-esteem, and better equip them to live and teach these innovative, best practices to their families and friends.

The articles in this journal echo many of the themes of the plenary presentations and the workshops. The various essays are diverse as they are written from scholarly and praxis modalities. The authors include physicians, priests/pastors, therapists, scholars, activists, journalists, and poets – some in combination. The topics embrace wellness, suffering, spirituality, theory, practices, ritual, life decisions, healing, and transformation. Many attending the conference experienced the liberation of Spirit in their own lives over that four day period. As you read this volume, we invite you to continue with us, together, to liberate our own spirits, for the world. May you be so inspired that you will join together with women and men all over the world, committed to liberating spirit for the world, by participating in healthy conversations for action around health, wellness, justice, and spirituality.

Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan

An Open Letter: Sport Belongs to Us All

Dear Friends:

I believe that sport belongs to us all. Sport is a part of our nature as human beings. We are the only species on earth that take part in sport; others play and protect their territory. Humans are the only ones who set up barriers and jump over them to see who can reach the finish line first. While I have seen ants crawl onto a twig to get across a puddle of water, I have never seen ants line up those twigs and race those twigs!

We enjoy sport because it involves the mind directing the body through the dimensions of time and space. That requires a very powerful form of thought. I believe sport to be a birthright! To long, access to sport was denied to girls and women. And why is this birthright important? Sport provides many positive benefits to its participants. Experiencing the success that comes from learning a skill and demonstrating that knowledge is an immediate benefit of sport. Learning about cooperation, and learning that in a fast food world, true knowledge and skill take time to acquire is another area of benefit. For girls and women, sport participation teaches one how to make decisions: one is required to make thousands of decisions in a single basketball game. Gaining confidence in the skill of decision-making will help girls be able to say "no," at the most important times in their lives.

I believe in the Olympic Movement and its goal to contribute to building a peaceful and better world through sport. Through my service to the Olympic Movement for 24 years, half of my life, I have seen its universal power to unite people in a celebration of human excellence. I have fought to protect it and nurture its growth. IOC members have the responsibility to ensure that the Olympic Movement endures. I see the IOC utilizing the IOC's fundamental beliefs of respect and solidarity as well as the operating principles of inclusion, transparency and accountability as paramount for growth, change, and strengthening the place of women in sport and particularly in the Olympics.

For centuries, sport was not open to women; they were forbidden to participate in the sporting arena, to the point of being barred from even attending the ancient Olympics as spectators. While the reality is somewhat differ-

ent today, the changes have only come about because of the difficult plights of many brave women athletes and their supporters, who fought to involve women and to remove male domination from the arena of sport.

Even the French Aristocrat, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, who revived the ancient Greek tradition of the summer Olympic Games in 1896, thought that women had no place in the games. Most scholars consider Charlotte Cooper of England to be the first woman to have won an Olympic gold medal, in the 1900 Games' tennis tournament. More recent theories suggest that the honor actually went to Helen, Countess de Pourtales, a crew member of the Swiss gold medal yacht *Lerina* at the same tournament. In 1936, things improved when the IOC approved women's events in skating, fencing, swimming, and gymnastics. Amid the change loomed some controversies. Some in the IOC had suspicions that women athletes were not always what they appeared. Gender tests became a requirement during the 1968 Winter Games in Grenoble, France. In 1980, some of these suspicions were confirmed when an autopsy revealed that Stella Walsh, a polish born American who won the women's 100 meters in 1932, was a man.

Problems still loom large for contemporary women athletes. For example, in 1991, Islamic Fundamentalists in Algeria threatened to stone Hassiba Boulmerka to death for running in shorts and singlet when she won the world 1500 meter title. Nevertheless, Hassibla won the gold medal in the same event at the 1992 Barcelona Games. Reportedly, twenty-six countries refused to send women to the 1996 Atlanta Games because of Islamic dress codes. With all of the female participation, even as recently as Australia, 2000, some things have not changed a great deal. Men had 63 more medal events than during the Sydney Olympics.

As the first woman to become IOC vice-president, I am aware that the traditional and culture barriers takes a long time to break down. We just have to keep working to get more women in sport and in sports administration. We can make progress and we can make a difference. In 1996, the IOC called on national Olympic committees to ensure women hold at least one place in 10 on their executive committees. In 2001, we must work together to assure the health of women and the health of women's organizations, and I can think of no better way than to begin this process in the playing fields in sport.

Anita DeFrantz, 1st Vice-President
International Olympic Committee

Litany for Soul 2 Soul II Worship

Rev. Ruth Leshner

A Celebration of Beginning...

First Woman was born and in that moment, life experienced its first revolution.

First Woman breathed, the earth sighed, shifting its axis to meet her heartbeat.

First Woman opened her eyes and there was light.

We do not know if First Woman's steps were tentative or firmly planted on the ground.

We only know that she took them.

Each day opens with new steps and old ones intermingled, trampling on the foot of the other like two lovers creating a new dance, searching, searching, feeling their way along unknown landscapes.

Steps which are made bold through inner callings, steps which retreat when hurt, steps which are lightened through companionship, steps which shake us out of our complacency, steps that are never taken, steps that transcend all else.

All respond: Let us be mindful of where we step.

A Release of Images Past...

We have stepped into the images shaped for us by others: pushed, cinched, starved, painted, sculpted, dismissed, denied, acquiesced, made straight what is rounded; strutted down runways, hidden in corners, lowered necklines, raised hemlines, removed veneer, curled, teased, adorned. We have stepped into resistance. We have stepped into resistance. We have resisted these images; we have resisted the natural.

All respond: Let us remember our inner strength. Let us remember one another.

Transforming Embrace...

Cry with awe. Cry. And in the watershed, find women who dare to meet themselves face-to-face, celebrating their souls' history reflected in eyes framed by fine lines and in curvaceous bodies, sculpted by real living.

All respond: Blessed be the emergence.

The emergence of love: tender and tough, fragile and strong, confused and clarified, rejected and embraced, wild and shy, loud and silent, ethereal and earthy. Love that holds us in transition, prodding us toward transformation, toward revealing what we cannot always see – the pathway home toward authentic self – the acceptance of self-doubt and self-belief as living in tandem. For it is in being, doing, singing, and creating that our voice is cut loose, our steps sure-footed: it is in love that we are home.

All respond: Let us remember our healing wholeness. Let us remember home.

[I want to acknowledge the work of *On Amethyst Glass: Two Voices, One Song* by Rita Bregman, Barbara Michelman, Rebecca Salome, Manto Press, 2000.]

Seeking Enchantment In The Midst of Oppression

Earthlyn Marselean Manuel, Ph.D.

I have always gone about life seeking to change the disharmony between what I observe, learn, and practice in life. One of my earliest revelations was that freedom, joy, and love did not come to me just because I was human. As a child, I became aware that I was a particular type of human being with a specific experience of life. My life dictated a certain way of seeing the world. Over my lifetime, I developed an intense desire to change the reality where freedom, joy, and love seemed impossible within an environment of institutionalized oppression.

Wide-eyed and curious, as a young girl, I experienced things around me as unpredictable. I questioned the horrors of life. I thought deeply about the pain in the world. I was sensitive to this pain as early as seven years old, through my own experiences of hatred, both internal and external. I was stunned to realize that I was not welcomed in the world because of who I was. This caused me great suffering.

At church, especially during the sermons, I pondered this suffering in my life. Our family sat on the same half of the same pew every Sunday. I do not know to this day who sat on the other half. My mother sat on one end of our family group and my father on the other end. In between, my oldest sister sat next to Dad, my youngest next to Mom, and I sat in the middle.

When I heard something the minister said, I drifted into finding a meaning that fit my experience. I was not fascinated by what was being said about God and Christ, but by what was being said about life and death. Every Sunday, I sucked on Life Savers without realizing that the name of this candy represented my childhood desire to save my life from the suffering talked about from the pulpit. Each Sunday, as the suffering swirled about my heart, I felt that baptism promised salvation. I decided at age eleven to be baptized into the fundamentalist, non-denominational Church of Christ. This choice was my effort to transform suffering in my life and in the world around me. Yet, throughout the years into my adulthood, I remained restless and sensitive to the pain caused by not belonging in the world around me. (In this writing, I

return to this childhood quest as I explore ways to help transform suffering.) After exploring the concept of enchantment as a connection to my essential self, I then examine my personal experience of suffering as related to oppressive suffering in contrast to existential pain that can be disrupted with personal care. I then analyze enchantment as a means of being fully human in healthy relationships with myself and others, transforming suffering in the process. My essay concludes with reflection on a praxis of transforming suffering through various paths of resistance.

A few years ago, as a Ghanaian woman spoke to a group of us African American doctoral students, the word 'enchantment' fell from her heart into mine. The memory of a past experience of enchantment propped me up in my seat. I felt my stomach loosen as I recognized that enchantment was something I once knew. My sense of the word caused me to ask, "Is enchantment a way of being closer to my true, non-oppressed spirit or my essential self?" In the moment I heard this Ghanaian voice utter the word enchantment, I wanted to be reacquainted with what seemed to be an ancient, enchanted self.

Since this Ghanaian woman was speaking of enchantment from her lived African experience, I assumed my loss of an enchanted way of living to be a historical and devastating consequence of the enslavement of African people. In my African American sensibility, I could only think of enchantment as something that was lost deep in the ocean between two continents. Enchantment was something that was lost in my ancestors' experience of arriving as chattel to a land that was already filled with the blood of Native American relatives. I knew in my heart that without enchantment there was a loss of a sense of myself as a whole human being, having identity, knowing a lineage, speaking a native language, and making sacred music and dance. Suffering, for me, is a way of being painfully aware of unconscious, unspoken, and silent disregard for my existence, particularly as that disregard becoming internalized.

Suffering is a result of a broken heart that occurs as one experiences dismemberment, a denial of one's membership within humanity. As I live in this kind of suffering, my restlessness is increased around what is right and wrong. This polarity of right and wrong, restlessness, and the need to resolve suffering creates a consciousness of struggle and defeat at times. In this consciousness, suffering is exhausting.

I personally view my suffering through the oppression in being an African American lesbian woman. In being such, my life is one of the greatest journeys of self-acceptance. Self-affirming and life-affirming attributes have not always been present. The absence of such affirmation has caused me to have delusions of my true existence. This deluded state denies me a sense of well

being. I have had to sit and listen seriously to my voice of truth to remind me that in fact, there is real power inherent in being who I am. This power is not so readily available that all I have to do is say that it is so. Rather, I have to experience my life as infinite as the universe. I have to focus on not having all that I want, but instead on being all that I am. I am not afraid to be wondrous and glorious: I am afraid when I am not.

There is nothing largely new about my internalized oppression, feelings of betrayal, pain, and suffering. But revisiting these states once again helps me to clarify the reality of suffering that I seek to transform. In revisiting them, I found open spaces in them for enchantment. Enchantment was buried in my pain and suffering. I had to revisit and then excavate my suffering. I found that pain could be disrupted before it turns to suffering. I realized that I could care more deeply and more tenderly for myself in the pain to create that disruption. What was new in revisiting my experience of suffering is that I had to question it. I challenged the experiences that kept me in the suffering. I examined all the internal battles I had ever fought as a warrior. I asked, "Is there still a war inside me?"

Eventually, after being in the quiet of meditating and journaling, a feeling of enchantment in my body came through and warmed me. I felt my suffering being silenced. I felt my soul deciding not to suffer anymore. The overwhelming feeling of old pain subsided. I began to see and feel the experience of enchantment. Words were coming to me. Words about me: it was clear that enchantment was not an experience outside of who I was and how I lived. Enchantment was about me and my spiritual relationship to the world.

In enchantment, I am living fully as a human being. I am joined with humanity. I trust the true, loving qualities of humankind in whose presence I must nurture enchantment. I have faith that as a human being I am capable of enchantment. I saw enchantment as sustained happiness and joy in the midst of oppression. An experience of enchantment is not a temporary situation or event to distract me from my suffering, but is a whole experience of life. Enchantment is a joy that is not obliterated in mistreatment and pain. This experience is a kind of happiness that is rooted in knowing and possessing myself, as I perceive my true nature. I know who I am and what is true about me. Enchantment lets me perceive my own identity through self-creation and self-validation. Enchantment affords an integrated sense of relationship with myself, society, my ancestors, and the Earth, feeling a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging includes having a sense of life without boundaries dividing me from others, the world, and myself. When I am enchanted I know what I feel, think, believe, and trust. To be enchanted is to be enlightened to the many truths that exist in my life. Enchantment is to bring

what I know and what I feel into alignment with my many truths.

I know that suffering will always exist in my life, but I do not need to live my life by the stories I have formed around my suffering. I experience transforming suffering into enchantment as climbing into my own vastness as a human being; it is a process of being strengthened by change. Within oppression, if I have no capacity for transformation, then my focus in life is suffering. To experience transformation within oppression, for me, is to experience life as ever evolving. From this perspective, the transformation brings about many new experiences of life. Therefore, I experience life with the deepest desire to change myself and everything else in the world. As a consequence of that desire, transformation becomes a way of life. I can change the equation of Black womanness equals suffering to Black womanness equals transformation as a living practice.

I experience transforming suffering into enchantment as transforming the tensions of my life into a sense of well being. This experience is also one of transforming a feeling of separation into a genuine mutual alliance with humanity. Such a transformation recognizes that there must be wellness within and around me; it means healing my pain, understanding and knowing my own human qualities as aligning with and belonging to the human race.

To reclaim the experience of enchantment, I have taken many paths. I have tried to approach transforming suffering from an outer place using political action, social means, and education, as well as from an inner place that relies on a variety of spiritual or therapeutic approaches to work with my own responses to oppressive conditions. However, I constantly return to spirituality as my path to survive the waves of oppression.

Although I am a practicing Buddhist, I focus here on Christianity as a path because of my experience with it as a religion and as a part of my spiritual evolution. Also, Christianity has been a mainstay among African Americans in seeking enchantment. When I re-read Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved* recently, I was reacquainted with the sermon of Baby Suggs. This rhetorical proclamation was not a sermon about heaven, hell, and sinning, but one about the beauty of being God's people. In the novel, spirituality existed in gathering places among the trees. This spirituality was a commitment to each other's well being and joy--a sharing of freedom within the community. Baby Suggs was a preacher without an agenda. Morrison named her an unchurched preacher: she was "uncalled, unrobed, unanointed, she let her great heart beat in their presence" (p. 87). Baby Suggs' pulpit was in the center of the forest under the sun. Her message, "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard" (p.87). Suggs' sermon of self-acceptance was a kind of spirituality that helped the

people to embrace their spirits despite the dehumanizing social conditions: a spirituality that co-existed along with efforts toward enchantment.

This type of spirituality in Beloved was born of a lived experience of slavery. I acknowledged the disempowerment Christianity brought to slaves, but there was also a spirit of dignity and a sense of being divine that the slave held onto from their African past. Despite the intent of slave masters to use the Bible to coerce slaves into compliant behavior, slaves were creative in bringing an African spirit to the teachings of the Bible and to Christianity. By doing so, the Bible was used to resist the master, a path by which the slave survived (Earl, 1993; Dash et al, 1997; Paris, 1995).

The conditions of slavery did not completely cut the slaves off from their ultimate source of the meaning of God or religious and moral understanding (Paris, 1995). Instead the slaves maintained their African spirituality. Even though they left many of their religious artifacts in Africa, they brought with them mythology, proverbs, folktales, and an oral tradition that spoke of a God, or many gods and goddesses. Their traditions sustained and preserved the people of the tribes. Through great ingenuity, the slave synergized the Christian meaning of God with African religion. When they understood that God as a creator of all people was on the side of the oppressed, that Christ was a liberator, and that God was just (Paris, 1995; Cone, 1975; Cooperlewter, 1986), the slaves embraced the Bible. This notion of God and justice together made black people's Christianity a socially conscious religion as well as a promise to be a transformative and liberating one.

I was raised with this promise. But I realized that I no longer worship God in the way I had been taught as a Christian. The existence of God is not as an almighty person controlling my life. God is everywhere, in everyone. God is the Goddess. The universe is God. I no longer perceive worship or spiritual life as something that is prescribed by the Bible. But I still resonate with the fundamental principles of Christianity that suffering can be alleviated by: (a) being responsible for the land, (b) uplifting one's own and other's personhood and dignity, and (c) having a deep-seated faith [in God] (Townes, 1997).

The relationship between the meaning of God and the perception of humankind is critical to being enchanted in the midst of oppression. The promise of transforming suffering within Christianity kept me on the spiritual path in seeking enchantment. I also was attracted to the ancient African religion of Yoruba with a desire to be reconnected to my ancestral past. I found Yoruba difficult to practice fully in this country even though I embrace much of the philosophy. Eventually, I was led to Buddhism where transforming suffering is the focus of the practice. I learned in my practice to live my prayers. I

became conscious of those prayers. I learned that my every thought and action were my prayers. I began to perceive the web of suffering as something that I could change. Yet, my transformation had to occur within an environment of external and internal oppression. I did not hear any talk of this kind of transformation in which oppression was the experience of suffering.

I have since begun the journey of renovating my Buddhist practice so that my particular life experience as a Black lesbian is reflected in my spirituality and in my prayers. I do this by reflecting, speaking, and writing about that experience. I want to understand the transformation of suffering due to oppression in the context of Buddhism. To do this, I must reflect on my life. This reflection in itself is a spiritual path toward seeking enchantment as I learn about how I have changed within Buddhism even though I still experience oppression. When a relationship is made between transforming my suffering and institutionalized oppression, I am less likely to reproduce oppressive conditions or suffering in my own life. To learn about myself is a desire to change my relationship with the world and hopefully the world will change its relationship with people like me. I suffer when I agree with the erroneous perceptions of me. I experience enchantment when I am able to see for myself that I did not create oppression. I have to believe that suffering is not inevitable in the sense that I can not do anything about it. I have to rediscover love for myself. I need to experience myself as worthy. I will always want to do something about the suffering of oppression, so I will always be forced to ask, "What is to be done?"

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Illness as a Mythic Descent and Turning Point

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Illness and the Soul

The diagnosis of cancer has the impact of a stone hitting the still surface of a lake, sending concentric rings of disturbance out, as feelings, thoughts, and reactions radiate out from this center. It impacts relationships, it stirs the depths of others, it potentially brings the patient, and those who are affected "close to the bone," into the proximity of the soul. Soul questions arise about the meaning of life when the body has a potentially fatal disease. Healing and recovery may depend as much or more upon a deepening of relationships and connection to one's own soul and spiritual life, than on medical expertise.

I have learned over and over again, that cancer or any life-threatening illness is soul-shaking for everyone involved, that it provides us an opportunity to get intimations and intuitions about why we are here, and what and who really matters. It is this experience and the archetypal underpinnings provided by mythology, that I have to contribute.

The reality and possibility of serious illness evokes soul from the first moment it registers: it might be after hearing a report that something serious was found on the x-ray or more sophisticated scans or in the specimen sent to the lab, or after an illness announced itself with the sudden onset of acute pain, loss of consciousness or bleeding, or after the discovery of a suspicious lump or discolored area. Whenever or however that line from health to illness is crossed, we enter this realm of soul. Illness is both soul-shaking and soul-evoking for the patient and for all others for whom the patient matters. We lose an innocence, we know vulnerability, and we are no longer who we were before this event, and we will never be the same. We are in uncharted terrain, and there is no turning back. Illness is a profound soul event, and yet this is virtually ignored and unaddressed. Everything seems to be focused on the part of the body that is sick, damaged, failing, or out of control, instead.

My premise is that serious illnesses, especially potentially terminal ones

can be soul evoking and that the soul realm is one akin to dream or reverie, a source of personal meaning and wisdom that can transform life and heal us. This is not to say that illness is ever welcomed. It can only be retrospectively appreciated by those for whom it was a soul experience, but having a perspective such as this, makes the potential of it being so more likely.

Recovery of soul and recovery of the health of the body may occur together or not; healing may occur and the body may not survive. Life is a terminal condition, after all. It is a matter of when and how we die, not whether we will. Cancer, AIDS, and other critical illnesses take us out of our ordinary lives and concerns, and confronts us with big questions and the opportunity of tapping into soul knowledge that can transform us and the situation. Prayers that are said and rituals that are done help by focusing us and by tapping into spiritual energies.

At a soul level, we can see clearly what matters and recognize the truth of our personal situation. We know that we are spiritual beings on a human path rather than human beings who may be on a spiritual path. At the soul level we recognize what is sacred and eternal. At the soul level, an illness even a terminal one, is a potential beginning, a time when we are on the threshold between the ordinary world and the invisible one.

Soul Questions

I believe that in any particular illness as in every individual life, soul questions are the same: What did we come to do? What did we come to learn? What did we come to heal? What and who did we come to love? What are we here for? Questions to do with the essence of who we are. I believe that illness can be a call to consciousness, a wake-up call some would say, that cancer especially involves a descent into the depths and an exposure to what we fear. I have seen how cancer can unearth love and reveal strength of character, and know that it is truly an opportunity for soul growth; or not. I believe that stories and myths, dreams and mystical experiences can become more vivid during illnesses, and that integrating soul knowledge from these sources into ordinary life makes life as well as death meaningful.

A serious illness often takes us by surprise. The shift between being healthy and being sick can happen to someone so precipitously, that it leaves us stunned, and without words for the death into which we are plunged. Words from someone familiar with the territory may provide an orientation, images and metaphors that reflect what I know may be a starting point for inner reflection or the basis of a dialogue on a soul level with someone else. Whether suddenly or gradually, serious illness – especially cancer has the power to cut through illusions and bring us close to the bone. Maybe for the first time in our lives.

To be brought “close to the bone” through the adversity of illness, the closeness of death, and the knowledge that we are not in control of the situation, is to come close to the essence of who we are, both as unique individuals and as human beings. Like x-ray films on which the bones are the most distinct, because they are the strongest and most indestructible elements of the body, so it is that adversity reveals the eternal and thus indestructible, qualities of the soul. When the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness enters our circle of people, it touches us deeply. It takes the patient, those who love them, and those who treat them into the realm of the soul.

The Ground Gives Way Under Us: Illness As A Descent

When there is a before and an after, when there is an event that marks the moment that brings ordinary life to an end, which is often the case with cancer, the shift that occurs has the force of a natural disasters, a personal earthquake that disturbs the ground under us. Before the diagnosis, before the operation, before the accident, before the discovery that there is something wrong, we live in innocence or denial. Then everything changes, and we feel that nothing may ever be the same again.

In this, we may feel like Persephone, the maiden in Greek mythology who was gathering flowers in the meadow when the earth opened up in front of her, and out of the deepest, darkest vent in the earth came Hades the Lord of the Underworld, in his black chariot drawn by black horses to abduct her. He pulled Persephone to him and she screamed in fear, as they circled the field and then horses and chariot, carrying Hades and terrified Persephone, plunged back from where they came, and the earth closed over as if nothing had happened.

One moment, Persephone had nothing more on her mind other than which beautiful flower to pick; the sky was blue, the sun was warm, and all was well. The next moment, she was in the underworld and nothing was the same as before. Her innocence and security were violated, she was helpless, and at the mercy of forces beyond her previous knowledge. This myth applies to everyone. Persephone is the innocent part of men and women, youngsters and elders, who encounter Hades as the perpetrator of incest, rape, mugging, betrayal, of any unexpected and unforeseen act that shocks us into an awareness of our emotional or physical vulnerability. Hades is also the symbolic event that exposes us to a specific awareness of good and evil. Before Hades, we feel protected, after Hades we know that we are not. Once a laboratory test comes back HIV+, or a biopsy reveals cancer – through whatever means we learn of a life-threatening illness, the effect is the same: Persephone – the assumption of youth and health, the assumption of safety an immunity from

disease and death has been violated and taken into the underworld.

For us, poetic metaphor expresses our feelings and is a means through which we communicate our perceptions and understand the meaning of an experience. Illness as a descent of the soul into the underworld is a metaphor that brings to the intuitive mind and knowing heart a depth of understanding that cannot be grasped consciously otherwise. It is also in the language of the soul.

Descending in Stages in the Underworld: The Inanna Myth

The descent of the soul into the underworld which illness can precipitate does not always have the impact of a shocking, sudden, and unexpected abduction or the immediate devastation of being at the center of a major earthquake. Persephone's myth applies when this is so, but there is a second myth that parallels the experience of people whose illness and descent occurs in stages through an incremental loss of footing in the ordinary world of good health: either because they have an illness with a gradually worsening pattern or because they maintain the illusion of being in control and minimize the emotional impact of having a serious medical problem. The myth that resembles the journey they take goes back at least five thousand years to the Sumerian goddess, Inanna.¹

Inanna was the Queen of Heaven and Earth. Heeding the news that her sister goddess, Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld was suffering and in pain, she decided to pay her a visit. Inanna mistakenly assumed that she could descend with ease. She would find however, that the power and authority she had in the upperworld, had no bearing on how she would be treated in the underworld.

Inanna knocked imperiously on the gate to the underworld, demanding that the door be opened. The gatekeeper asked who she was, and then told her that in order to pass through, there was a price. She would find that there was not just one gate, but seven. At each one, the gatekeeper told her that she must take off something she was wearing to pass through. Each time, Inanna responded indignantly, shocked that this should be so, with the words: "What is this?" Each time, she was told: "Quiet, Inanna, the ways of the underworld are perfect. They may not be questioned."

Her magnificent headdress, the crown that designated her authority, was removed at the first gate. The lapis necklace was taken from her neck at the second gate; the double strand of rich beads was removed from her breasts at the third gate. She was stripped of her breastplate at the fourth gate, of her gold bracelet at the fifth gate. The lapis measuring rod and line were taken from her at the sixth gate. At the seventh gate, she was stripped of her royal

robe. Naked and bowed low, she entered the underworld.

Whenever a person becomes a patient and enters a hospital, the experience is not unlike Inanna's. Metaphorically, there are a series of gates to go through, and at each one, something is taken away. At the door to the hospital, he or she unwittingly crosses through the first gate. In increments, thereafter, a patient is stripped of dignity, choice, and authority. However important the patient is in the world, however significant he or she is to someone else does not matter here. The second gate is the admissions desk, where each person must sign a number of papers in order to be admitted, receives a hospital number, has a plastic identification band fastened around a wrist, and may be given a receipt in return for surrendering valuables.

The third gate is usually the hospital room. Here each patient takes off street clothes which are reflections of individuality and status and puts on the standard hospital gown, that often is ill-fitting, too short, and open up the back. Then there are the other gates, through which a patient is taken on a gurney or in a wheelchair, to radiology for x-rays or more sophisticated tests, to other specialized rooms for blood tests or to have various scopes inserted into orifices or through body walls in order for the doctor to see inside the body.

When surgery is called for, the patient passes through more gates, to the pre-operative area, into surgery, then into post-operative or intensive care, and in going through these particular gates loses both consciousness and usually a part of the body as well.

In coming to terms with having a life-threatening illness, a person is often stripped of emotional defenses as well. Denial, intellectualization, and rationalization may go, exposing a person to the painful realities of their lives as well of this illness. People who use work and activity, alcohol or drugs to numb their feelings no longer can do this (though television, which may be the commonest addiction, is immediately turned on at many hospital bedsides).

When psychological defenses dissolve in the context of life-threatening illnesses, a descent into the underworld of depression and fear can occur. A dissolution of defenses against knowing the truth may reveal an emotionally and spiritually barren life, an empty marriage, or a meaningless job, as well as the reality of the seriousness of the medical condition and accompanying fears.

Metaphorically and actually, illness and hospitalizations strip us of what covered and protected us in many ways. Indignities happen, and a "What is this?" protest may be met by words and attitudes from hospital staff that resemble those that Inanna heard: "Quiet, Patient. The orders of the doctor are perfect. They may not be questioned." Even when our physicians are healers

whom we trust, and they as well as the others communicate what and why whatever is being done is required, and even if we are fully involved in the decision making, the journey is still similar to Inanna's. There are still gates we go through, which strip us of persona and defense: we become exposed and bare-souled.

This stripping away makes it possible for us to reach depths within ourselves that we otherwise might not reach, where whatever or whomever we consigned there or abandoned or forgot of ourselves, suffers the pain of not being remembered or of not being integrated into our conscious personality or allowed expression. In remembering, we find ourselves connecting with soul. What is actively sought in a depth analysis may be inadvertently revealed as a result of having a disabling physical illness or entering a hospital with a condition that will take a patient through a difficult and uncertain course, through making a descent into the underworld. Psychological depth is the realm of Ereshkigal, as is death. When death takes on a reality and becomes close, soul questions arise.

Chemotherapy and radiation patients make an Inanna descent. Each treatment is another gate. After the second or third chemotherapy treatment, hair often falls out in clumps. On this descent at this gate, you surrender your head of hair, and even if you were expecting it, this is a shock. For women especially, it is a loss that strikes at identity and femininity. It is often a low point, a depressing time. The face in the mirror is unfamiliar. "Who is this?"

Inanna was naked and bowed low when she entered the underworld, she had been humbled and stripped as she descended, but the ordeal was not yet over. When Inanna came into Ereshkigal's presence, the goddess of the underworld was not happy to see her. Filled with wrath and judgement, Ereshkigal gazed at Inanna with the baleful eyes of death, and struck her dead. Then Inanna's body was hung on a hook, where after three days, it began to decompose.

Inanna and Jesus: Transformation of Suffering

Inanna's fate at this point reminds me of Jesus, and the series of betrayals, humiliations, and punishments he suffered on the way to the cross and as he hung from it on Good Friday until he was dead; his body was put in a tomb, her" hung on a hook for three days. When illness strikes, people do feel betrayed and humiliated by their bodies, and pain is pain whether from a whip or being nailed to a cross or from some source beneath our flesh. In the midst of suffering, many people feel like Jesus, alone and in pain, on the cross crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Just as hanging on the cross was not the end of Jesus' story, hanging on a

hook was not the end of Inanna and her myth. She, too, was brought back to like, significantly transformed. In the language of the soul, death is a major, recurring metaphor. On the spiritual journey, death of the old personality is required, for an initiation, transformation, rebirth, or resurrection. On the medical journey, patients often feel like Inanna: the hospital feels like an underworld in which they are stripped and humbled, and then unconscious under anesthesia, literally become a slab of meat on an operating table. Or after a series of tests and treatments, each of which takes them deeper into an unknown, fearful world, patients feel metaphorically left hanging on a hook in the underworld awaiting news that they can come back to life.

In the bowels of the hospital, or the receding world that illness creates, or in the fearful half-light of the psychological underworld patients enter the realm of Ereshkigal, when they reach the point of realizing that their old self and old life is dead; at least for now, perhaps forever. For the soul – this can be a turning point: facing the possibility of disability or death can be reorienting, it can bring about a massive change in priorities, and bring to the forefront questions of meaning and meaninglessness about how we are living our lives, about what really matters, and whether we matter. For the ego that had maintained the illusion of control over faith, this is often the lowest point. For the person – if ego turns to soul to lead the way through the underworld, there will be unexpected discoveries. For its not what happens to you, but how we respond that ultimately matters and shapes who we are from inside out.

Responding to Unchosen Circumstances

Ever since I read Viktor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*² I have had an appreciation of a spiritual and psychological reality: that no matter how little control we may have over circumstances, that even in the most terrible situation, we have a choice of how we will respond. This insight is empowering. Frankl and all of his relatives were taken into German concentration camps, where every one of his family members perished. In this situation, there was no freedom, no choice about what or whether one would eat or work or be sent to the gas chambers the next day. The prisoners were starved and beaten, their legs became swollen with edema; they were stripped of identity, reduced to a number, and denied basic human dignity. And yet, even here, there were choices to be made at a soul level. Some people just gave up, others acted in the same in human way as their captors toward weaker inmates, and still others shared what they had, maintained loyalties and even sacrificed themselves so other prisoner's might survive longer. In the apparently meaningless and inhuman existence, Frankl noted that there remained a choice of attitude to take. He emphasized that the search for meaning is

essential, and that the will to live depended upon it. If suffering or dying is the task, doing it well or poorly is a choice.

Once confronted with a life-threatening diagnosis, we are usually able to recognize how insignificant and unimportant many of our everyday concerns are. We may find that we are for this time, free of neurotic preoccupations; what matters, for a change, may be what really matters. "Cancer can be an instant cure for neurosis" was how several women at a conference for breast cancer survivors put it.

At this same meeting, women who made major changes in their lives as a result of a cancer diagnosis and were not just surviving the cancer but thriving remarked how their illness was "the worst thing that had ever happened to them and the best thing that had happened to them". Men who were work-driven, aggressive, and ambitious until they were felled by cancer or heart disease, who slowed down and refocused, say the same thing. Usually these women and men took a good, long look at what was wrong in their lives, and acted decisively to end what was bad for them – at the body and soul level – and moved toward what sustained and nourished them – also, at the body and soul level.

It may be that they (finally) ended dysfunctional, soul-draining relationships with narcissistic, controlling, needy, abusive or chronically angry people, who responded in their characteristically self-absorbed fashion to the news of the life-threatening illness. Or they (finally) stopped self-destructive addictions to cigarettes, alcohol, or work. Usually, they (finally) acted on their own best behalf because they knew that their life depended upon it. In this, their illness served as a awake-up call that enabled them to face what they had resisted.

Illness As A Turning Point

A time-out is called by teams when they are behind and there is a need to stop the clock, pause for breath, consider a new strategy, or bring in a new player. We wonder as they huddle, if they can possibly come from behind to win. The patients in Lawrence LeShan's *Cancer As A Turning Point* were in an analogous situation. Their poor prognoses meant the clock was running out. At this juncture, they began doing psychotherapy work with LeShan.

LeShan asked them soul-searching questions, ones that cannot be answered by the intellect, but require delving deeply and returning with forgotten memories of joy and contentment, an being truthful about the numbing despair or lack of meaning (which are related) in their lives. In his thirty-five years of working with cancer patients, LeShan, a research and clinical psychologist found how psychological change along with medical treatment mobilizes a

compromised immune system for healing. He found that enhancing life extends life.

He asked: What kind of life and life-style would make you glad to get up in the morning and go to bed at night “good tired”? What would give you the maximum zest and enthusiasm in life? What kind of life can you conceive of that would use all of you, would be harmonious with you physically, psychologically, and spiritually? What kind of life would be “natural” for your entire being? Who would you live if you could adjust the world to yourself?³

Finding Your Myth

LeShan’s questions reminded me of Joseph Campbell’s response to a young man in the audience who had listened to him speak about the necessity of finding your own myth. For finding your won myth and finding answers to LeShan’s questions are variations on the same theme: discover who you are and live according to that truth.

He asked Campbell, “How is a person to go about finding his or her myth?”

Campbell responded with a question of his own: “Where is your deepest sense of harmony and bliss?”

“I don’t know –I’m not sure,” was the reply.

“Find it,” Campbell sang back –“and then follow it.”⁴

Campbell was often quoted and sometimes criticized for saying Follow your bliss by people who did not understand what it might mean to do so. Far from irresponsibly moving from one hedonistic pleasure to another, it was advice that may lead to a lifetime’s commitment –as it did for Campbell when he followed his love of mythology.

The answer to LeShan’s questions and Campbell’s answer to the young man come from what gives you your deepest sense of harmony and bliss, which has to do with soul. Psychologically, there is harmony and bliss when what you are doing and being is a personal expression of an archetypal pattern through which the Self is felt. You feel centered; you have a sense of being yourself, there are moments that are sacred, and there is meaning in your life.

When as much of a cancer is removed as is possible, and the remainder weakened and reduced by chemotherapy or radiation, doctors and patients seem to wait for the cancer to return and inevitably get you. LeShan’s patients and others with long-term remission are living rebuttals to this course of events. They must be able to do so because the cancer and the body’s defenses arrive at some sort of détente, like a political balance of power, the cancer cannot over-

come the body's defenses and the body can't rid itself entirely of the cancer – except perhaps little by little, with a return of vitality and an enhanced life and strengthened immune system.

A turning point occurs, when something tilts the balance of power between illness and health. LeShan's work with cancer patients shows that living a life that is right for you can have such an effect.

Sometimes We Need A Story

Sometimes the difference between life and death begins with a story, especially if the patient has gotten the message that there is no further hope. Expectations are powerful. The words and attitude of others – especially doctors – are potent. They help or hex healing and recovery. When a person is taken into the underworld by a life-threatening illness or a soul-shattering violation, it is an emotional enactment of the myth of the Rape of Persephone. In the beginning, she was gathering flowers in the meadow and then the earth opened up and Hades came out of the depths to abduct her.

It was not until Hermese the messenger god descended to the underworld and appeared to her, did she realize that she would not remain there forever. Hermes, with his winged sandals and cap of invisibility, whose Latin name is Mercury, was the god who could go between levels and cross boundaries. He was called the guide of souls. When Hermes appeared to Persephone, he brought the message that she could return to the upper world, that recovery was possible.

Hermes is symbolically present in the story that reaches a person with cancer who has given up or has been given up by others. These are words that mobilizes hope and lead to action that in turn, affects the healing response of the body and soul. For words to become a healing story, the message and the messenger are believe.

A healing story has emotional power: it brings meaning, hope, and vision together; it connects body and soul. It can be as simple as saying or as complex as a biography; it can come from a conversation, a newspaper clipping, a scientific report, from television, or a myth. A story can bring the power of imagination into a situation. If we identify with the story, it is incorporated into us, and every cell and molecule in our body responds. When a person is in a crisis and uncertain, the right words can be life-sustaining. There is an "aha!" response when the soul makes a link between a story and my story, it's a sense of recognition that something feels intuitively, deeply right; a match between inner inclination and outer configuration.

Prayer

While we have only our subjective feelings to support the practice of prayer as having an effect, belief that we are doing something for the people with life-threatening illnesses when we pray is supported by research. Larry Dossey, M.D., assembled the scientific evidence of the healing power of prayer in his book *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine*. The research done at San Francisco General Hospital by cardiologist Richard Byrd, was especially noteworthy.

Over a ten-month period, a computer assigned 393 patients admitted to the coronary care unit to either a group that was prayed for by home prayer groups (192 patients) or to a group that was not prayed for (201 patients). It was a randomized, double-blind experiment. None of the patients, nurses, or doctors knew which group any of the patients were in. Byrd recruited various religious groups to pray for those patients and a brief description of their condition and diagnosis. Each person prayed for many different patients and each patient in the experiment had between five and seven people praying for him or her.

The results were impressive: The prayed-for patients were five times less likely to require antibiotics (three vs. sixteen patients); they were three times less likely to develop pulmonary edema (six vs. eighteen); none of them required an artificial airway and a mechanical ventilator (zero vs. twelve); and though not statistically significant, fewer patients died who were in the prayed-for group.⁵

In my mind, there are people with life-threatening illnesses, whose life or death fate seems to teeter precariously. With them, something can make a difference; in others, perhaps there is an inevitable progression and nothing can make a difference. An intuitive speculation is that there are crucial moments, or weeks, or even years, where the outcome of most diseases can be reversed. The illness may have begun with an infection, a chemical shift or a cellular change, repressed anger, hopeless despair, a depletion of physical, psychological and spiritual resources, a genetic susceptibility, or a combination that made the person susceptible and unable to resist the inception and progression up to this point. It cannot hurt to pray for healing, since there are no adverse side effects; besides which, I think that a prayer can sometimes be like a feather on a delicate scale that tilts the process in the direction of health.

Musings

A life-threatening illness brings suffering and soul into life. It makes us aware of how short life is, how precious good moments are, and how unbear-

able or bearable pain can be. The qualities and attributes of being human become intensified and condensed in times of crisis.

If we are spiritual beings on a human path, rather than human beings who may or may not be on a spiritual path, then the most difficult periods are those that also teach us and test us and often pull us back onto a soul track or a heart path that we had lost. The hard times are the times when we grow as souls, or falter. We learn from experience that this human path we are on becomes much easier when we love one another, see the divinity in each other, and know we are not alone.

Notes:

¹Diane Wolkstein and Amiel Noah Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983) pp. 52-71

²Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (1946) trans. Ilse Lasch (New York: Pocket Books, 1963).

³Lawrence LeShan, *Cancer as a Turning Point, A Handbook for People with Cancer, Their Families, and Health Professionals*, Revised Edition (New York: Plume, 1994) p. 41 (paraphrased)

⁴Keith Thompson, "Myths as Souls of the World" (Book Review: *Inner Reaches of Outer Space*, by Joseph Campbell, *Noetics Sciences Review* (Winter 1986), p. 24.

⁵Larry Dossey, *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1993), p. 179-181. Original study by Randolph C. Byrd, "Positive Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer in a Coronary Care Unit Population," *Southern Medical Journal* 81:7 (July 1988): 826-29.

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CONNECTION: Turning Suffering Inside Out

Darlene Cohen, MA, LMT

D've come to think that alienation, our lack of connection, is our greatest suffering: our separation from each other, from the earth, from our own bodies, from our feelings and emotions, from our creativity and from our activity itself. This alienation is very pervasive right now in our culture. We all feel this estrangement, reflected in the unraveling of the fabric of our society, in which very few individuals feel any responsibility for the well-being of us all. It isn't only minority groups who must struggle for full acceptance politically and economically who feel ill-treated and left out of the so-called mainstream, but almost everybody, regardless of privilege or opportunity, feels dismissed, unheeded, unlistened to. People don't talk to each other; they call their lawyers. In many ways the way we live our lives today weakens or threatens the fundamental connections that we as human beings have enjoyed since ancient times. Despite what generations of our forefathers and foremothers knew before us, we need a clock to know what time it is, a therapist to help us discover our feelings, machines to exercise our bodies, money to buy food, and science to explain processes that we probably once understood as intimately as our own breath. We may be able to function adequately under these conditions day-to-day, but when we fall into dire situations, we are overwhelmed by our misery because we have lost the primal, healing connections that contribute to our well-being as human beings:

While the feeling of alienation may be our greatest suffering, its opposite, connection, a sense of union, or intimacy, may be our greatest comfort and joy. All the gifts of healing I learned from my pain have to do with reestablishing these primal, healing connections:

To Body and Breath

Before I was stricken with my disease, I only knew my body from the outside, how it looked in a mirror. Despite its being strong and young and dependable, I was very critical of it. Too much fat over here, legs too short for

my long torso, shoulders too broad for my small frame. I would never appear in short shorts because the shape of my knees fell well below beauty queen standards, and I didn't wish to impose my physical flaws on others -- mostly I didn't want to be judged for them! The idea that I might ever cavort about in short shorts because it's hot out and be unconcerned with how people judge my artificially round, arthritic knees, scarred from replacement surgery, was unthinkable. What changed is that I'm no longer just an observer. Now I can't tell exactly where my body ends and what I mysteriously refer to as "I" begin. My body and its sensations are how I experience my reality. My breath sets a rhythm for my activity. I breathe in the world, then I breathe it out. I feel my body's yearnings as the wellspring of my own desire. Grounded in my body, I am able to distinguish generosity from obligation, need from avarice, appetite from obsession.

To My Deep Yearnings and Needs

More subtle than bodily cravings, the need for creativity and self-expression must have some sort of spacious playing field to be felt and cultivated. Most of us don't take the impulses to play and create seriously as important yearnings to be satisfied for health and balance. I have come to recognize what a tremendous contribution to my health is the expression of my urge to create, whether to produce some material product, to have sex, to solve a problem, to devise, to invent, to play. Thus I have set up a work pattern that encourages the flow of my own particular stream of original thought: relaxation, intense short work periods without distraction, frequent breaks, all of which encourage me to cultivate the practice of playing with thoughts and feelings and the obstacles that block my path.

I have had clients who came to me with chronic physical problems that they felt intuitively were related to their inability for whatever reason to find some creative outlet for their energies. It felt to me like their organic vitality was somehow working against the tissue in their bodies, like an autoimmune disease does, rather than flowing out into the world through their hands and minds. Jesus is reputed to have said that if you don't express what is in you, what is in you will destroy you. I don't think most of us take our yearnings for self-expression seriously enough to include that need in our day-to-day lives.

Admittedly, it might be very hard to turn a job at Burger King into some sort of ultimate self-fulfillment but the wish to do so is a need very close to the yearning to live wholeheartedly, with one's full being, which can be indulged anywhere. When I was an office temp, I used to amuse myself by creating elegant letters with aesthetically pleasing proportions and borders from the

dictation I was given. A few of my various bosses told me it actually gave them pleasure to sign such a distinctive page. It saved me from stupefaction.

To My Feelings

From my study of zen meditation, I have learned to practice respect for all my feelings: anxiety, pain, hatred, pettiness, sympathy, resistance, joy; they're all sacred. None is inherently less real than another. By myself and with friends, I have developed rituals which allow safe connection with feelings of despair, bitterness, grief. We've acknowledged the end of menses, the loss of a beloved brother, and the finding of a birth mother this way. When we practice these rituals together, spilling intense feelings into motions involving objects that have been used for such purpose since the beginning of time -- candles, plants, incense, stones, drums -- the shared activity is imbued with a gravity and release that can't be accounted for by the simplicity of the motions that have composed it. I think the powerful healing aspect of these simple observances is often just the fact that we've taken our feelings seriously enough to create a little ceremony to express them.

A client of mine was very annoyed and scolded her husband for coming in and telling me a joke while I was massaging her at her house. When I asked her why she minded so much, she said to me, "He was using up my time with you." She was not in a state of mind that could be satisfied by simply listening to the sound of her husband's voice as he told a joke, of feeling my fingers on her body, of sensing the animal presence of the three of us sharing the room. She didn't even examine the starved, jealous mind that resented his brief interruption.

Paradoxically, noticing this kind of small-mindedness can actually add rich texture to the weave of your life. When you include the shadow in your perceptions, your conscious life begins to be shaded and textured by your anguish and your petty little snits. Sanitizing your thoughts and your preoccupations not only squanders vital energy that would be better spent in your creative endeavors, but your not-so-presentable life can be enormously enriching and provide the compost for the development of compassion. If you have never given into temptation of any kind, how can you ever understand -- or embrace -- the sinner? I pointed out some of these things to my client. When I next saw her she told me that after our session she had begun to be flooded with perceptions. She had noticed how much pain her tense relationship with her teenaged son was causing her. Being numb had enabled her to tolerate their friction, but now it was clear to her that she couldn't live with those hard feelings. She had to engage him and discuss their problems.

People sometimes ask me where my own healing energy comes from. How in the midst of this pain, this implacable slow crippling, can I encourage myself and other people? My answer is that my healing comes from my bitterness itself, my despair, my terror. It comes from the shadow. I dip down into that muck again and again and then am flooded with its healing energy. Despite the renewal and vitality it gives me to face my deepest fears, I don't go willingly when they call. I've been around that wheel a million times: first I feel the despair, but I deny it for a few days; then its tugs become more insistent in proportion to my resistance; finally it overwhelms me and pulls me down, kicking and screaming all the way. It's clear I am caught, so at last I give up to this reunion with the dark aspect of my adjustment to pain and loss. Immediately the release begins: first peace and then the flood of vitality and healing energy. I can never just give up to it when I first feel it stir. You'd think after a million times with a happy ending, I could give up right away and just say, "Take me, I'm yours," but I never can. I always resist. I guess that's why it's called despair. If you went willingly, it would be called something else, like purification or renewal or something hopeful. It's staring defeat and annihilation in the face that's so terrifying; I must resist until it overwhelms me. But I've come to trust it deeply. It's enriched my life, informed my work, and taught me not to fear the dark.

To Other People, Relationships

One aspect of intimacy that particularly interests me is relationship with other people, specifically the kind of relationship that promotes healing and nurtures your ability to see things as they are. I advocate consciously developing nurturing relationships: making the kind of intimate connection with others in which "I" and "thou," "otherness" disappears. Or that a lot of "otherness" disappears. Enough so that what you feel is the connection, not the otherness. These relationships are not only with people, but certainly the ones with people are the most problematic and the most revealing. Other people help us to see the conflict between what we want and the way it really is. In that gap our lives become alive and compelling. When I became ill, I gave up self-sufficiency, my illusion of myself as an independent, self-reliant strong woman. I didn't expect it, but I got something in exchange: relationship. All the difficulties you have with other people give you a tremendous opportunity for intimacy if you and they are willing to process difficult feelings.

If you are sick or under a lot of stress, your family and friends might unintentionally isolate you, thinking they are protecting you from additional stress, when actually they are cutting you off from their lives. If you're sick,

your daughter may not share with you her worry about being ostracized if she won't take drugs with schoolmates; your friends may not tell you about their "trivial" concerns anymore, thinking they are frivolous next to your problems. Your husband may not "bother" you with his financial worries, when what you yearn for is to be included, reassured that you still are connected with people when you feel so isolated by your pain or stress. Because the people around you feel so helpless in the face of your ordeal, it is usually up to you to make the first move, to make known your need to be included, not protected, if that's how you feel.

Research tells us that tending to others and sharing their suffering may have an ameliorating affect on our own. I have a friend who was terribly abused as a child and has suffered a great deal in her life. She studied to become an acupuncturist and has been working with patients in San Francisco. Even though she has been virtually penniless at times in her lives, and has no economic security of her own, she volunteered recently to go to Mexico and work in a clinic there, for her support only. When I commented on how altruistic this seemed to me, she told me candidly: "The only way I ever found to deal with my own suffering is to attend to the suffering of other people."

To the Activity of Our Daily Lives

I consider it the greatest tragedy of our modern life that we spend all day doing a job but are so disconnected to our activity itself that we have not even noticed what we've been doing. Since we often find our jobs deadening and exhausting, we come home at night and need the evening, and then the weekend, to recover from the way we spend our days. This is sad, indeed, to think of spending most of our lives this way. We think the only way we can get through our workweek is to numb ourselves, but actually the opposite is true. We need to wake up, to be alive and involved in our activity, to live all our moments, to do each thing for the sake of doing it. I know many people who think the solution to work-as-boring is to get a "meaningful" job, one that holds inherent interest; so that we are either fulfilling ourselves through it or doing good for others. I don't think this is necessary, however. I don't think we need to replace what we do for a living with a "meaningful" job -- Thank God -- we only need to connect up with our activity, to notice it, to stop dismissing it as mundane and then going numb.

I had a favorite client, Julia, who came to me once a week for years for treatment for her rheumatoid arthritis. Due to the massage and movement sessions I gave her, and her own exercises between treatments, Julia was very high-functioning. She had a full-time job and a family. She was capable of

relaxing -- she became a noodle on the massage table -- but the minute her session was over she would jump up and start putting on her clothes so frantically, she would undo everything she had just done in the realm of stretching her joints. I could never successfully communicate this idea to her of using her daily life as one long exercise in healing. And it became apparent over the months that that was the only thing that would really make a difference in her level of health. Then one night she said to me as she was rushing out the door after her session, "I hate when you give me new exercises." I was quite surprised. "You do?" I said.

She explained. "I get up in the morning, go to work, work all day, come home, fix dinner, eat dinner, clean up dinner, and by then it's eight o'clock. I have maybe two hours, tops, to live my own life, to really be alive. Whenever you give me new relaxation exercises, I have to do my work twice as fast and do my exercises as fast as I can so that I can have some time for myself."

So I said, "Julia, weren't you alive when you went to work? When you came home and fixed dinner, ate dinner and so on? And weren't you alive especially when you did those relaxation self-awareness exercises I gave you for your pain?" She looked at me sheepishly. "Oh, yeah," she said. And of course we both realized what the problem was: she divided up her life into tasks she had to do and actual living and she madly rushed through her work so that she could begin to live. She defined being alive as having unstructured time, time that belonged only to her, when she was free of obligation. Unfortunately for her -- and for most of us -- that kind of free time is quite rare in most of our lives. If we define really being alive that way, we are going to be numb most of the time and thereby squander the vast majority of our precious time that we have to live. No wonder Julia felt, despite a supportive, loving family and three homes in different beautiful places in California, that she was a deprived person. No wonder she spent so much of her time contracting her muscles and compressing her joints.

Living is about active participation and total involvement in our everyday activity. Hanging out with the laundry, the dishes. Fingering the uneven surface of a rock; feeling the evaporation of sweat on the back of our neck on a sultry summer afternoon; the comforting warmth of a cup of coffee or tea on a rainy evening; even the flash of irritation when someone cuts us off on the freeway. Our hearts start beating faster, our jaws clench in rage, we might say or think something dramatic. That may be the most alive we feel all day! We usually ignore all these events as mundane but they are actually the stuff of our lives, and therefore our healing.

Healing for me is connection to my activity itself, the practice of doing each thing for its own sake; And of course intimacy with other people, to

plants, to the earth and sky, the laundry, the traffic, the commercials, the mundane anguish of our daily existence. There's nothing special or tragic about it; it's just my life, day in and day out. Even though it's nothing special, it's not easy to penetrate our numbness and become willing to open ourselves up for all the details of our daily lives, including the stress and pain. Because of our conditioning to avoid unpleasantness, the hardest thing may not be so much bearing the unpleasant experiences we have, but learning how to experience the details of our suffering so thoroughly that "suffering," "stress," and "pain" lose their distinctive character and just become our lives, and rich lives at that. We're usually so caught up in our opinions that we can't experience things as they are. We'd rather think about how "unfair" something is, or how morally superior we ourselves are, than experience the actual feelings involved in a disappointment at work. But how we open ourselves to feeling, how we embrace all the experiences life has to offer, has a great deal to do with how connected we feel.

To Our Suffering

I think our connections to people and things are shaped by our relationship to our suffering. I actually don't know any better way to deal with pain and suffering besides intimacy with it. By intimacy I mean allowing ourselves to feel the actual experience of suffering, of discomfort, anguish, distress, despair. Absorbing and being it. And if we cannot absorb and be it, then settling into the painful isolation of not absorbing and not being it. This too is the intimacy of suffering. This is not passivity nor nonaction, but instead it is action from a state of complete acceptance. Simply being the suffering. Complete openness, complete vulnerability to life. This might go on at the same time that you are railing against your pain, and searching for ways to stop it. They don't hinder each other: completely accepting your suffering and looking for ways to end it. They are both active encounters with our life.

We must begin by cultivating the ability to acknowledge our own suffering and that of others. The world that opened to me through engaging the physical suffering and mental anguish caused by my disease has turned out to be inexpressibly rich. Because if you can engage with your suffering, connect with it, dance with it, tease it, coax it, curse it, as well as trying to change it, just consider it your life, experience it as your life, the only life you have, it changes the quality of that suffering. It's not just your suffering; it's everything and when you look at it that way, you can't make the usual divisions between things, and you feel connected up with everything, and it's strangely comforting. Paradoxically comforting. When I experience my pain that way, as one of the myriad feelings that rise and fall, I often fail to name it as "pain"

in particular; it's just my experience. There's no separation between me and pain. Because there's no separation there's no gap to be inhabited by resentment, fear, or projections into the future. In this way we become deeply connected, inseparable from our experience, whether of pain or pleasure. To me our awareness of these things without preference -- to the earth, our bodies, our sense impressions, our creative energies, our feelings, to other people -- is a mediation that synchronizes body and mind. This synchronization, the experience of deep integrity, of being all of a piece, is a very deep healing. It is the only way I know of to alleviate suffering.

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Women's Multifaith Perspectives on Global Child Advocacy

Carol L. Flake

"Children around the world still die of malnutrition and disease in huge numbers--about 35,000 per day"
(O'Neill, 1994, p. 100).

"Civic-free global capitalism threatens to devour the world's children. It demands that each nation sacrifice their schooling and their employment to its greedy machines that apprentice them to information without knowledge and consumption without joy. It separates the lives of children into the two worlds of poverty and affluence; it breaks the bond between children and society and between their families" (p. 99).

My essay explores the complexities surrounding global child advocacy. After reflecting on how my own spiritual transformation affected how I viewed and responded to the oppression of women and children, I then explore the import of unity among diverse populations and challenges; liberation theology as a strategy for addressing the oppression of children; the valences of a multifaith global child advocacy perspective.

Spiritual Transformation

My father commanded me to get in the car. "This is not our business!" he shouted, slamming the door and turning on the ignition.

A very small, very dirty, native American boy had taken a nasty tumble onto the concrete in the park in Taos and his leg was cut and bleeding. There were no adults in sight except my parents who were packing up the car after our picnic lunch. His little sister tried to pick him up, but she was not much larger than he was. My stomach turned a somersault at the sight of the blood,

but my heart melted. I ran over to offer assistance but my father called me back.

I realize now that my father was afraid, but at age 11, I was crushed. My highest motivations had been squelched. Hadn't we learned in our Sunday school about the Good Samaritan who helped the hurt man on the road? And weren't we supposed to love all the children of the world?

Years later, as an adult, when I saw a tired and tattered woman and her two small children begging in Mexico City, where the atmosphere is often so polluted that schools must close for the day, an arrow of pain pierced my heart. I turned away and passed them by, but I cannot forget the haunted eyes of the mother and the vacant eyes of the hungry children.

Even later, in the streets of Trivandrum, India, a horde of children surrounded me. Some of the emaciated, begging children, I was told, had been purposely maimed so that tourists would take pity and provide money for food.

Moral and ethical dilemmas, precipitated by repeated encounters with substantially less privileged others, have served their purpose in my own spiritual transformation. Accidentally, as a child, and intentionally, as an adult, I gradually began to break free from my sociocentrism, my cultural trance as a privileged white woman in the United States of America, and become more global centric, more compassionate towards all the world's children, not just those in my own backyard.

Over consumption by a small minority of the world's population and increasing rates of poverty, overpopulation, illiteracy, violence, and environmental degradation are clearly causing undue suffering for children. A truly moral and ethical world would solve these problems. Yet, currently, the annual military spending of developed countries is equal to the total income of two billion of the poorest people of the earth. How can we begin to eliminate the poverty and oppression of our youngest world citizens and their families? What guidance is available from the world's religious and secular ethical traditions as we attempt to address this dilemma and plan for the future of our children and our grandchildren?

Children throughout the world are weeping; 155 million of them live in absolute poverty. Fourteen million of them die each year from preventable diseases and 12 million are refugees who have been driven from their homes by war and turmoil (National Council of the Churches of Christ, 1991). Currently there is an estimated total of 800 million people in absolute poverty in the world with 450 million malnourished (Stone, 1999). And when parents are impoverished, their children are doubly impoverished. Even in the relatively wealthy United States, poverty among families with children is grow-

ing, with over 2,000 children being born into poverty and 27 dying because of poverty each day. One hundred thousand children in our country are homeless each night and those numbers are much higher in developing countries such as the Philippines where there are 200,000 street children. Inequities abound and are increasing. In the United States, there are 33 million poor with 86 percent of all financial assets held by 10 percent of families in 1983. Globally, the United States, with only 5 per cent of the world's people, consumes 30 per cent of the world's mineral resources (Kaufman & Franz, 1996). Over a billion people--disproportionately women and children--starve and die early from poisoned waters, soil, and air (Ruether, 1996). "Deforestation means women walk twice as far each day to gather wood. Drought means women walk twice as far each day seeking water. Pollution means a struggle for clean water largely unavailable to most of one's people; it means children in shanty towns dying of dehydration" (p. 6). A capitalistic, consumer-oriented consciousness is gobbling up the world, leaving the so-called "developing" nations, and the poor in our own country, starved for the basic necessities of life.

Liberation theology and multifaith dialogue are two of the most exciting movements in theology today. In a global society, characterized by multiple forms of oppression and religious pluralism, it is important that consideration be given to the nexus of these movements (Cohn-Sherbok, 1992), to the seeds of liberation theology in all world religions, to determine what they might offer in the way of addressing the needs and rights of the world's children. The United Nations (1991) has already articulated its own Convention on the Rights of the Child. But is there a way that the world's religions can unite to advocate for the rights of our youngest world citizens?

Before we proceed, let me share my basic assumptions:

- We are rapidly destroying our Earth's ecosystems and its ability to sustain human life, resulting in increased suffering of our children, especially those in developing nations.
- Personal and global spiritual transformations are possible and desirable to help the human family address the critical problems of overpopulation and over consumption.
- The world's great religious traditions provide paths for this necessary spiritual transformation.
- Spiritual transformation proceeds from egocentric, to sociocentric, to global centric, to boddhisattvic resulting in total compassion (Wilber, 1996).
- Global centrism requires that we care about all the children of the world

and the health of Gaia herself.

- We can change the world one person at the time.
- Multifaith and inter-ideological dialogue are transformational and essential for constructing a public theology.
- Each of us must begin where we are and do what we can. (Think globally, act locally!)
- Religious communities must encourage religious citizenship--an activism attached to a deep sense of religious faith.

Unity in Diversity

For the well being of future generations it is critical that we link sustainable communities, families, children, and youth in ways that will reduce the risks of inequality of income, health, and education to which market society remains wedded (O'Neill, 1994). Can we accomplish this goal without being totalitarian or ignoring the dignity and the claim of others? Can we identify universal guidelines for living and acting that do not do violence to our religious and cultural pluralism (Metz, 1999)?

A classic study by Sherif et al. (1961) examined the development of competition and collaboration among young boys at summer camp. Competitive, warring groups of eleven year old boys were transformed into cooperative members of a community when they were given a problem to solve that required every boy's help. Sherif determined that identifying a superordinate goal, a goal that all the boys considered important, was the key factor in reducing competition and increasing collaboration. Establishing such a superordinate goal, making a commitment to improving the health and reducing the suffering of all children and our planetary home, is necessary for us to take the required steps to avert the very real dangers that are confronting us today, as a move toward liberation.

Liberation Theology and Child Advocacy

When God is seen as love and justice in action on the side of the poor and oppressed, as is true in liberation theology, this view creates important parallels between Christianity and other religions. In fact, liberation theology issues a call to all the other religions of the world who are willing to show a preferential option for the poor and commit to liberate all of humanity from all forms of oppression including poverty, servitude, racism, and sexism (Ferm, 1992). And it is often the children of the world who are the most negatively affected by these oppressions.

The seeds were sown for liberation theology when the Second Vatican

Council (1962-1965), with six hundred Catholic bishops from Latin America participating along with others, mandated that those attending return home and take action to eliminate glaring social inequalities. Liberation theology yielded fruit when the Latin American theologians convened their own conference in Medellín, Colombia in 1968 and determined that church communities must show "a preferential option for the poor" (Ferm, 1992, p. 2). The fruits of liberation theology began to be harvested almost simultaneously in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, emerging as an epiphenomenon from personal, religiously-focused, involvement in the lives of the poor and from Vatican II with its commitment "to make the world more human" and to "remove the immense economic inequalities" (p. 1) pervasive in the Third World. Vulnerable populations such as indigenous peoples, racial and ethnic minorities, women, children, the elderly, and migrants and refugees were of particular concern.

Liberation theologies are not identical. Unique features arise in Asia, where there is a plurality of religious faiths; in Africa, where Christianity is influenced by native African religions; in U.S. Black liberation theology with its emphasis on equity for African Americans; and in feminist theologies with their focus on the oppression of women throughout the world. Ferm (1992) has identified eight common features:

1. **A preferential option for the poor.** An overriding concern for the poor, the needy, and the oppressed is the foundation of liberation theology.
2. **Base human communities.** Liberation theology is a "people's version of theology" (p. 5) emerging from actions and reflections of communities of oppressed people trying to live lives of faith, hope and love. As a result, liberation theology poses a serious threat to established churches. In Asia, base Christian communities of Buddhists and Christians join in a common struggle against poverty and oppression.
3. **The challenge of indigenization.** Any religion makes sense only in terms of what local people can understand and assimilate in terms of their own language, culture, and customs. No theology can be transported from one culture to another intact. The problem becomes how to separate the extraneous from the essential, the chaff from the wheat.
4. **A new methodology.** Kosuke Koyama (1974) describes two approaches to theology. Living room theology is traditional, formal theology transmitted by ministers, missionaries, priests, popes, and

church councils. Kitchen theology is informal and emerges from the everyday lives of the poor and oppressed. Praxis is the name given to the theological methodology which emphasizes the continual interplay of action and reflection.

5. **Sin and evil as personal and systemic.** Personal sin is that demonic impulse which drives us to use our power to accomplish our own goals at the expense of others. The excesses of capitalism in which glaring social injustice and global inequalities occur as a result of the profit motive exemplify systemic sin. A religious message of love cannot be believed when rich countries continue to dominate resulting in poverty, racism, sexism, or any other form of oppression.
6. **God as liberator.** The God of the rich is not the same as the God of the poor. The God of the rich makes them feel comfortable in their roles as oppressors. The God of the poor liberates them from their oppressors through justice and love.
7. **Human liberation latent in all religions.** In the Christian tradition, Jesus claimed that he came to fulfill the Jewish law and the prophets, emphasizing justice and love in the struggle of the poor and oppressed for human liberation. Samuel Rayan (1984) of India believes that there is a latent liberation theology in all religions and must include insights from Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist theologies focusing on service, voluntary poverty, love, and mutual respect.
8. **Justice and spirituality.** For Gustavo Gutierrez (1984) justice and spirituality are both essential ingredients in any liberation theology. They must never be separated because they form the "convex and concave sides of the liberation lens" (Ferm, 1992, p. 17). The spiritual dimension, which pervades all reality, can be an important bridge between Christian liberation theology and Eastern Religions. Liberation theology issues a call to all the religions of the world, for them to address the needs of children.

Multifaith Perspectives on Global Child Advocacy

As the extraordinary amount of cultural diversity and religious pluralism in the world continues to be revealed, it becomes increasingly important for us to focus on the development of guidelines for human behavior that take into account the commonalities and particularities of various religious traditions. Tissa Balasuriya (1984) of Sri Lanka suggests a planetary theology that transcends particular ideologies and religions and arrives at "a higher, wider and deeper level of sharing among all human beings" (p. 95). This view em-

phasizes the compassion of God/dess as the central focus and is seen as the only hope for humanity, for "the poor and the rich, the oppressed and the oppressors, the theists and the atheists, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists andHindus"(Song,1984, pp. 167-168).

The new ecumenism that is called for is not simply a coming together and comparing of religions. Instead, it is "the praxis of a common response, a common resistance to the sources of unjust suffering in the world" and "to the cold alternative of a global community in which increasingly the 'human being' vanishes amid self-serving systems of economics, technology, and their culture" (Metz, 1999). It is time for the world's religions to join together to agree upon a global ethic to alleviate the suffering of all the world's people. Members of the Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Baha'i, traditions were among those signing "A Global Ethic" (Kung & Kuschel, 1993) at the World Parliament of Religions which met in Chicago in 1993. This document asserts, "Peace eludes us...the planet is being destroyed...neighbours live in fear...women and men are estranged from each other...children die!" (p. 13) and calls for us to open our hearts and "serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely." (p. 15). In addition, the global ethic calls for us to have respect for "people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water and soil" (p. 14).

Founded in 1992, Partners in Dialogue is a university/community multifaith group which follows the guidelines for interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue outlined by Leonard Swidler (1984). The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn through sharing multiple perspectives with honesty and sincerity. In dialogue, we do not compare our ideals with another's practices, but, instead, we compare our ideals with our partner's ideals and our practices with our partner's practices. A dialogue is not a debate. Dialogue members do not try to convert each other. I recently convened a panel of women who I had worked with on the steering committee of Partners in Dialogue to share their perceptions of global child advocacy from their own particular faith traditions. Dr. Carl Evans, Chair of Religious Studies at the University of South Carolina, facilitated the discussion. Following are some of the women's perspectives that were shared in the multifaith dialogue along with some background information on the various religious traditions.

A Hindu Perspective. Ms. Arunima Sinha, mother of three children ages 25, 20, and 19, shares her understanding of Hinduism and her perspectives on global child advocacy. "Hinduism is of a very universal nature, constantly struggling to embrace all and deny none. Everyone is potentially divine and the manifestation of this divinity is the goal of life. Recognition and realiza-

tion of the universal spirit within all is the key to unity among diversity. Service to the world is service to God. As one Hindu scripture proclaims, 'He who sees himself in all beings fears none and loves all.' The inward triumph of harmony and peace is the unique binding factor of all religions, races, cultures, and creeds. The languages of the tongue may vary, but the language of the laughter and tears of the world's children is unmistakably universal.

"The complex, yet simple viewpoint of Hindu philosophy was introduced to me in my very early childhood as one of the daily prayers of the family: 'My mother is my God, my father is my God, my teacher is my God, my guest is my God' As a child this hymn was just a moral code to sing and follow, but now it is the expression of the presence of the Divine in one and all. Being raised in the East and raising my family in the West is only a challenge, not a disappointment. I often look to the concept of desha, kala, and patra (place, time, and person) where the truth remains the same, but the practical applications of the ways to reach or know the truth change from place to place, person to person, and time to time. This flexibility gives me a great deal of freedom to raise my own children with a unique combination of eastern flour kneaded with Western water.

"In almost every household in India, every morning starts with meditation and prayers and the night ends with bedtime prayers. I remember my childhood years of waking up to the bells ringing and the hymn singing of my grandparents in front of the family shrine. Here in the United States, getting three children ready with their lunch, book bags, and assignments and dropping them off at different schools mostly turned into rushing and shouting. However, I simply sang and chanted those songs of my childhood years to my children while driving them to school. During the night, I would sit in the hallway and sing while my children would fall asleep so that they could hear my prayers in all three bedrooms. Now I see the fruits of my songs and my love.

"Faith brings inner peace. It leads us to many virtues including kindness, intuitive wisdom, compassion, and everything that is good and noble.

"Love is synonymous to God and love alone can conquer the world and the world's problems. The bright eyes of all of the world's children are shining while reflecting the rays of the same Divine. Let us not miss even a fleeting glimpse of the Divine by embracing their needs and lives within our very own. Om shanti, shanti, shanti. Om peace, peace, peace."

A Buddhist Perspective. Ms. Barbara Howe, a mother of three and grandmother of two, is a member of SGI, one of the 80,000 different sects of Buddhism. "The goal is world peace. This is what we are seeking for our children. Let me read from one of our texts: 'Being human means we will constantly

meet up with challenges. True happiness is having the tools to take on each hurdle, overcome it, and become stronger and wiser in the process.' Our organization is not a God-centered belief. Our belief is in a mystical, universal law, like gravity, which you can't explain. We chant the lotus sutra each day and this allows us to be in rhythm with the universe so that you are at the right place at the right time."

Because "genuine wisdom is manifested in compassionate action" (Kraft, 1988, p. xii), the new Buddhist agenda is concerned about "nuclear holocaust, irreversible pollution of the world's environment, and the continuing large-scale destruction of non-renewable resources. We also need to lend our physical and moral support to those who are fighting hunger, poverty, and oppression everywhere in the world." (Kraft, 1988, p. xii). Speaking about "socially engaged Buddhism," Jack Kornfield (1988) describes the path of compassion as "spiritual practice and social action" (p. 24). "Enlightened compassion – intense, interior awareness of the interdependency of all things and events to such a degree that the suffering of any 'sentient being' is experienced as one's own suffering – ideally guides Buddhist interaction" (Ingram, 1999, p. 221). "Mahayana Buddhists say, there are no fully enlightened Buddhas until every blade of grass is enlightened. We are all in this together" (Ingram, 1999, p. 222). Writing about his "hope for the future," the Dalai Lama encourages us to 'build closer relationships of mutual trust, understanding, respect, and help, regardless of differences in culture, philosophy, religion, or faith' (1988, p. 3). He says that world problems "cannot be challenged by anger or hatred. They must be faced with compassion, love, and true kindness" (p. 5).

A Jewish Perspective. Ms. Sue Rothberg shares her perspective. "Basically, Judaism has four groups, the Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and the new group of Reconstructionists. I was brought up Conservative but have changed to Reform. The basic premises of Judaism are that there is one God and to love thy neighbor as thyself. Our teachings are the Old Testament, the Bible, and our Torah. Judaism is a divinely inspired and human-centered religion. We teach our children to do 'mitzvah', good deeds, and to be charitable.

"Being human-centered, we are commanded to pursue social justice and social kindnesses. We reach out to help because suffering of our own people has taught us compassion and moral laws and exhortations of our heritage demand that we respond with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might. Our children are asked to 'Honor thy father and thy mother' as one of the commandments. And, 'Thou shalt have no other gods besides me,' which goes back to the one universal God. As far as the commandments go,

and all the laws or mitzvah, we are supposed to teach generation to generation which is our main prayer of the Shabbat. 'Teach them diligently unto children and thou shall talk of them while thy sittest in thy way and when thy walkest by the way and when thy liest down and when thy risest up.' We say this twice a day. Here is a quote from the Proverbs which says: 'Train your children in the way they should go and when they are old they will not depart from it.'

"The prophet Isaiah said, 'Never hide yourselves from those who need.' I am very proud to say that we have a number of social action initiatives especially focused on world hunger. As Jews, we have experienced suffering too often and too deeply to ever turn away from the suffering of others. The American Jewish World Service helps to aid the suffering in third world countries. We developed grain storage to help in the famine in Ethiopia and we established emergency feeding programs in Zimbabwe. We aided in disaster relief and missions in Bosnia. We support the idea of helping in Kosovo because the idea of genocide is not tolerable.

"Children are always involved in our religious services. A lot of the services are done in the home and children have the responsibility to pray over the wine and the candles."

A Christian Perspective. Ronald Stone (1999) points to personal and public morality, economic disparities, racism, political apathy, ecological corruption, and peacemaking as critical for the ultimate Christian imperative to love God and our neighbor. Ms. Cheryl Walker, a United Methodist, shares her particular Christian perspective as a member of our multifaith dialogue group: "Christianity is a system of ethical rules which enjoin us to love God with all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our might and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Christianity says that we need to die to self-interests. When we love God with our whole heart and when we die to self, we will be rewarded with a new life. We don't always understand this. We don't see immediate rewards, so we think we need to take care of ourselves. We think we need to grab and grasp. We think we need to see the trappings of success that society tells us will make us whole beings. So we put ourselves first very often.

"But Christianity is a religion which promotes the least, the last, and the lost. It shows us God making the scandalous choice, choosing the one whom no one would suspect. God uses murderers, prostitutes, and people who are uneducated, more often than not. If we would look to our neighbor's interests instead of our own; if we would also make the scandalous choice, we would be taking care of children as a priority. Children so often find themselves disproportionately represented in pathological situations such as pov-

erty and malnutrition. As a Christian I would advocate that we make the scandalous choice, that we treat our neighbors in our communities, in other cities, and in other countries as members of our families so that we can help the children who cannot help themselves."

A Muslim Perspective. Ms. Salwa Bakr begins with a traditional Muslim greeting, "'Peace be upon all of you.' Let me first define Islam. Islam is an Arabic word which means submission to God's word. Peace is achieved through active obedience to the revealed commandments of God because God is the only source of real peace. Islam is the third Abrahamic religion and a sister religion to Christianity and Judaism, the final one from God. Islam is a monotheistic religion in its purest form. We believe in one God who has no sons, daughters, or helpers. He is the creator and sustainer of the universe. Our holy book is the Qu'ran. About child advocacy, I am going to choose only four issues: 1) Abortion. Child advocacy in Islam begins at the most logical point which is the fetus. Islam protects the fetus through limiting the allowable causes for abortions. 2) Infanticide. Before Islam came, female children were buried. Islam forbade this. 3) Education. 4) Inheritance.

"In Islam one of the biggest sins is hypocrisy. God warns us about hypocrisy. If we tell our children, alcohol is bad for you, but we consume it, then that is hypocrisy. Also, we know that we are here for only one reason and that reason is to worship God. We teach our children to pray five times a day and to feel God's presence in every minute.

"Education is an obligation. The Prophet Mohammed emphasizes this. The more you learn, the more you will feel God's presence. Also, we believe that charity to the poor is a must. We also fast. We experience how to be hungry. We fast one month a year for 16 hours a day. During that month we become very compassionate to the poor."

A Baha'i Perspective. Ms. Nancy Songer shares her perspective as a member of the Baha'i community. "Because people are not necessarily familiar with the Baha'i faith, let me give just a little description. The Baha'i faith is a world faith, not a sect or a denomination. It teaches that there is a single, infinite, unknowable God; that there is one faith and this faith has been revealed progressively throughout history through manifestations of God that we have known as Abraham, Moses, Christ, Buddha, Zoroaster, Krishna, Mohammed, and, more recently, the founder of our faith, Baha'ulah. We believe that each one has taught progressively the same spiritual truths in different words, depending on our capacity to understand at the time, and different social teachings, depending on the changing needs of humanity. The most important need of humanity at this age is that of unity.

"As a mother, and as a person who referred to the Baha'i teachings to help

me raise my child, I have thought a lot about the teachings of my faith and how they would apply for issues of advocacy and protection of children. It offers these things. One is a definition of a human being. A human being is a spiritual entity. This has tremendous ramifications for the ways that we should do things. Children are born pure and they are called to nobility. Each person is born into the human race as a trust of the whole human race. Our purpose individually is to know and to love God. The teachings of the religions help us to do that and the experiences of our lives help us to deepen that understanding.

"The purpose of humanity as a whole is to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. Part of the process for individuals is to serve humanity. For us, the highest form of worship is service. To me this creates a context for how we look at things, the decisions we make, and the environment in which we place our children. I am going to read from the Baha'i writings that which gives the essence of what this world is for human beings. The words of Baha'ullah as a mouthpiece of God: 'Out of the wastes of nothingness, with the clay of my command, I made thee to appear and have ordained for thy training every atom in existence and the essence of all creation. Thus, ere thou didst issue from thy mother's womb, I destined for thee two founts of gleaming milk, eyes to watch over thee, and hearts to love thee. Out of my loving kindness, neath the sade of my mercy, I nurtured thee and guarded thee by the essence of my grace and favor. And my purpose in all of this was that though mightest obtain my everlasting dominion and become worthy of my invisible bestowal.'

"It seems to me that our religion and the community that it creates has to offer is an environment in which this is seen as the purpose of life and to create an atmosphere in which it is possible for human beings to thrive and to become what God intended us to become and to attain the nobility that is our potential. What our community does is to emphasize the oneness of humanity and to teach this to our children. We have been asked to produce the first prejudice-free generation. Our communities are racially, economically, and culturally diverse."

A Unitarian Universalist Perspective. Aurelia Reinhardt, a Unitarian Universalist leader, emphasizing in 1933 the importance of world-mindedness wrote "...humanity is living in a many-roomed earthly mansion, and the walls of the political structures are too thin to keep out the cries of distress on the other side of the partitions" (Fischer, 1994, p. 81). Ms. Kay White, mother of two children ages 4 and 6, reported to our multifaith dialogue group, "I wanted to give my children religious guidance. The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship was perfect because of the religious education. Unitarian Universalism is based

on tolerance and acceptance of all religious beliefs. One of our best qualities is our diversity. Our children are taught Judaism, Christianity, and eastern religions. They can make up their own minds. But, at the same time, we have certain principles. Our seven principles will give you an idea of who we are and what we believe in: 'The inherent worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity, and compassion in human relations; Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations; A free and responsible search for truth and meaning; The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large; The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.'

"From these values and the fact that our children get to have conversations about all religions and to learn about all of them and make their own choices, I think they gain a lot of confidence in the world. We are sending out children who are proud about who they are and about being accepted."

Secular Ethics and the Rights of the Child

As it is clear from the multiple perspectives expressed here, there is much that is held in common in terms of the rights of children and the responsibilities of adults toward the world's children. Clearly that in a pluralistic world such as ours, no single theological view can be embraced as the exclusive religion, no matter how prized it is by any individual group (Fins, 1994). Fortunately, a rich secular ethical tradition has also been established to guide us as we consider global child advocacy. For example, Nel Noddings (1990) and others have described an "ethics of caring" and the Children's Defense Fund, founded by Marian Wright Edelman, has outlined the major problems confronting children in the United States, joining with groups such as "Stand for Children" and the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church to advocate on behalf of children. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the first international legal statement of human rights for children in November 1989. Emerging after ten years of negotiations, the United Nations' document (1991) addresses "civil, economic, social, cultural, and political rights for children" (p. 22). One hundred and thirty-five countries have ratified this "Convention for Children." Children's rights established by the Convention include love and security, healthy food to eat, a decent place to live, adequate medical care, protection from abuse and a good education. The National Council of the Churches in the USA (1991) has supported these international rights for children, established by the United Nations. Included are the American Baptist Church, the Church of the Brethren, the Episcopal Church, the

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, the Presbyterian Church, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. The United States has not ratified the United Nations Convention for Children.

A Prayer for our Children

Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." I believe that the human community can find the will to transcend our differences and take action to address the poverty and suffering arising from overpopulation, over consumption, and environmental degradation. Holding this faith in my own heart, I will close with a prayer from Manuel Leandro C. Domingo, a Catholic priest who works at a shelter for homeless children (www.tuloy.org) in Manila. Manny participated with me as a Coolidge Fellow during the 1999 annual colloquium sponsored by the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life. He focuses on the role of religion in rehabilitating children in crisis in the Philippines.

Loving God, we bring our prayers to you in union with the cries and yearnings of the children of the world. We pray in a special way:
for children who have lost their mother, father, and loved ones through war or natural calamities;
for children deprived of the joy and the meaning of being a child;
for children forced to live by the sweat of their brow;
for children who have nothing or nobody to call their own;
for children forced into a life of crime who bear the faults of their elders;
for children wounded by rejection, humiliation and exploitation;
for children who beg and scavenge for their daily bread;
for children who have nowhere to lay their head;
for children mercilessly deprived of the light of day.

We entreat you, caring God, please:
bring back the smile to their faces;
inspire them to dream once more and believe in themselves;
safeguard their sensitivities to care and be cared for from their experience of pain, indifference and hatred;
open their hearts to the blessings of faith, hope and love and sustain the flame of goodness in their hearts;

strengthen their capacity to look forward to a tomorrow of dignity and respect, a tomorrow with family, home, food, clothes and toys; renew the world that people can lay down their arms and offer each other the gift of peace;
give children the joy and security of calling each other "my sister, my brother;"
most of all, we humbly pray that you will be present in their hearts and lives that they may praise and glorify you forever.
Amen.

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With Memory of Violence: Toward a Restitching of Theological and Cultural Loopholes

Julia Watts

Feminist foremothers created and invigorated a countercultural truth about violence. Born from their struggle is a language that politicizes women's experiences of violence, and offers strength and solace to survivors. Certain truths repeat in the literature of rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, and those who love women: Rape is never a woman's fault. Victims of violence are not to blame. All people deserve to be safe. Despite the prevalence and fervor of these claims, especially by those who have experienced violence, a host of personal exceptions persist. Beneath the surface of survival-language lives an interior language of evasion that allows us to believe certain claims are true for others, yet deny that balm to ourselves. This is the paradox of evasion: I can hear a friend's story about experiencing and surviving a violent relationship without assigning guilt and blame. I can weave the careful, gossamer words of support—begin nuanced, tentative dances in murky territory: that she did not deserve this, that she is not to blame for having done what survival demands. This statement is not a lie. I believe what I tell her with my whole heart and spirit. I know this to be true.

Yet, when I look at my own history, that sentiment withers. I answer my own truth with retorts and rejoinders; I stutter when I speak to my own heart. I learn the language of my own forgiveness only circumspectly. Shame strikes me suddenly, shivers through my body, and demands to know whether my experience, my truth, or my survival has all been a sham. Only with the greatest of care can I enter the terrain I know best—the landscape of my own history. Everywhere lurk tripwires and hidden explosives that dominant cultural thinking has laid in the midst of my heart. In interrogating the interior language of evasion, I want to bring my own words closer to home.

My essay explores personal and other women's stories of violence perpe-

trated on them as a theological and cultural reality. After exploring the functions of theology, I then reflect on : a search for meaning; an alternative to a Neibuhrian omnipotent ordainer; violence as the fall; perfectionism as a survival strategy; a comparison and contrast of good and evil; tangled love; and love of self and neighbor.

Role of Theology—Why a Theological Perspective?

Theology may seem a far cry from the most influential voices in determining a survivor's response to his or her experience with violence. Some survivors are not religious, some may have been raised in a religious tradition but find it largely inapplicable to their adult life, and still others may try to keep their faith separate from issues of violence—to avoid contaminating the one with the other. Survivors, particularly feminists, are suspicious of religion, especially Christianity, and they pursue non-Christian or unconventional Christian spiritualities. In some cases, religion and violence have intertwined, leaving survivors with complicated questions about faith, quietism, and complicity. Others have intentionally left Christian theologies behind. Survivors recovering from violence do so in a context where violence, healing, and recovery have certain cultural meanings. Regardless of their own religious beliefs or disbeliefs, survivors may find themselves internally or externally influenced by religious conceptions about the meaning of their experiences and the possibilities for redemption.

As a grounding assumption, this line of questioning views certain expressions of religious ideas as part of the broader cultural fabric, infusing and influencing our worldview, whether we are explicitly religious or not. Mainstream western Christian theology exercises a substantial effect on secular culture and values. Frequently, religious thinking shapes public conversation and public policy, unconsciously influencing the beliefs of a-religious people. Religious beliefs, even a shared, common outlook in a given society, form part of the cultural landscape in which recovery takes place. Western Christian theology comprises one of the cultural backdrops of this country, a grammar that shapes the experience and perception of many Americans, beyond where religion is recognized as influential. As such a discipline, theology can be interrogated from a variety of perspectives, including a search for meaning, as to the effects on an individual's sense of self and recovery from violence.

Satisfying the Omnipotent Ordainer: The Search for Meaning

The presence of Yahweh, who has substantially informed the secular sphere's indistinct, general conceptions of "God," is usually perceived as the omnipo-

tent ordainer of the world. The most prominent conception of Yahweh/God, especially for those aware of or shaped by Jewish and Christian religions, is of an all-powerful creator-god who more-or-less designed and determined creation's development. Determining the precise contents of that "more-or-less" is a theological debate of considerable proportions. What filters into the non-theological realm is the sense of a deity who is responsible for bad things when they happen in this world, a deity expected to prevent them, and a deity whose presence must somehow be understandable.

Belief in an omnipotent ordainer means that when most people reckon with violence, they are also somehow reckoning with God. The experience of violence becomes entangled with questions of causation, meaning, and divine dis/favor. Consequently, people ask questions about meaning where a deity is believed to have made choices about action or inaction regarding life happenings. In that framework, it seems reasonable to ask questions such as, "What is the meaning of physical disability and who does God afflict?" or "What is the meaning of slavery and what is God's relationship with those who are enslaved?" The questions and answers constructed by people holding socially dominant positions often differs substantially from those whose experience is one of social marginalization. Yet, the type of questions posits a search for divinely sanctioned intentions. Similarly, interrogating the nature of God's position relative to victims and perpetrators of violence implies that divine meaning might be salvageable from human-enacted abuse.

In describing this quality as a distinct character of his Christian ethics, H. Richard Niebuhr argues for recognizing the importance placed on interpreting and responding to divine action. He maintains that "at critical junctures in the history of Israel and of the early Christian community, the decisive question men [sic] raised was not 'What is the goal?' nor yet 'What is the law?' but 'What is happening' and then 'What is the fitting response to what is happening?'"¹ According to H. Richard Niebuhr, the ethical task becomes reading the meaning of God in the events of life and discerning the appropriate reply. He continues: "The God to whom Jesus points is not the commander who gives laws but the doer of small and of mighty deeds, ... the ultimate giver of blindness and of sight, the ruler whose rule is hidden ... but is yet in a way visible to those who know how to interpret the signs of the times."² Niebuhr's characterization of Yahweh reflects a deity who is responsible for determining the development of creation, whose will is writ plain upon the human body, and whose commandments lie secreted both within extraordinary events and the unexceptional occurrences of everyday life.

In the context of understanding violence, I find two implications of this theology to be troubling: first, that it makes the wrong people responsible for

dealing with the repercussions of violence and second, that it turns them in the wrong direction. Niebuhr's ethic instructs those who experience calamity to search for meaning within it—based on the divine meaning of the event. The question Niebuhr and his peers raise in every critical moment is about the interpretation of what is going on, whether a drought, or the invasion of a foreign army, or the fall of a great empire, and then be able to make a fitting reply. Niebuhr and other similarly minded theologians imply that the imperative to search for meaning amid violent occurrences is upon the survivors, but does not condemn bad behavior, nor does he excuse those who do violence or infer that they do not need to search for meaning.

I believe that this is a critical mislaying of responsibility. The victims of violence are not the ones who should have to tangle with the aftershocks of the abuse that has been done to them. The reality and personal importance of the post-trauma process among survivors should not make those survivors responsible for the meaning of violence. Ultimately, the perpetrators of violence should interrogate the meaning and implications of their own actions. Part of the unjust power relations that characterize violence is that the victims are left to deal with the aftermath of someone else's action. Most perpetrators can leave the scene of suffering and they often have the power to turn away from the effects of their actions. A theology that makes the victims responsible for unearthing the hidden meanings of trauma reinforces this unjust application of power that characterizes the violence itself; it is a re-violating of the survivor, a re-injury of the already wounded.

Secondly, theologies that flow from an effort to discern the meaning of an omnipotent ordainer turn the wrong people away from the human source of trouble. Violence often involves a betrayal of trust. In order to forge a life-affirming theology that works for people who have experienced violence, I believe it is important to articulate the source of that betrayal. I locate the betrayal in the humans who broke trust—in the abuser, in the rapist, in the batterer, in all who exercise power in order to control or dominate another. I do not believe that God breaks trust with those who experience violence. Blaming a deity for the presence of violence frequently makes the deity unavailable—or at least complicated—as a source of strength or solace. Theologies that understand victims as betrayed by God may deprive people of a critical partner in their process of healing and surviving violence.

Ultimately, when theology confuses human action with God's will, it colludes with violators. By focusing on God's intention, it mystifies the fact that human beings generally have the potential to choose whether or not they will commit acts of abuse. On a certain level, blaming rape on the failure of God's intervention excuses the rapist. Thus, God becomes responsible for the

action of the rape, the violence, obscuring the choices and responsibility of the person who raped, who acted violently. Consequently, theologies that articulate an all-powerful deity who is responsible for determining the course of all things can obscure and protect the human agents of violence; all too often leading victims of violence to grapple with God, instead of with society.

There can be a power and a purpose to railing at God, to lamenting an injustice of violence that shakes and scourges a body to the holy core. And for those people whose theologies bespeak a deity intimately responsible for life experience, there may be little other choice. In *Facing the Abusing God* which he subtitles A Theology of Protest, David Blumenthal includes "Beth's Psalm," a twenty-one year old Christian rape survivor's interpretation of Psalm 27. To God, she writes:

*I want you to deliver me from
this horror and violence.
I want you to be the shepherd.
Wake the hell up
and see me!*³

Later in the Psalm, Beth develops an image of God's face as being bruised and battered, writing that "Maybe the help you can give is limited. That is not your fault. But it is the nun's fault for teaching me wrong."⁴ She retracts the omnipotent image, though her relationship with God is deeply scarred by her experience with violence and God's refusal/inability to protect her.

Clearly, it is possible to direct anger toward God as well as anger toward the human agents of violence. Expressing and acknowledging the emotional response of survivors is an important, life-affirming task. In critiquing the model of blaming God, I do not wish to censure individual statements or feelings of God-centered fury or betrayal. But I resist the principal focus that certain theologies script upon that anger. I am suspicious of the ways in which theologies can protect the human perpetrators of violence by channeling survivors' rage toward God and want to suggest alternative approaches.

The Omnipotent Ordainer: Alternatives

A common human response that stems from an omnipotent deity is the search for God's intention and the lessons God shares through a person's life. For survivors of violence, this means an interrogation of the meaning of violence and of God's desire amid the violence. In her book *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag states that "illness is not a metaphor, and the most truthful way

of regarding illness—and the healthiest way of being ill—is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking."⁵ Sontag would likely disagree heartily with Niebuhr's "responsible self," whose task is to perceive the meaning inherent in all life experience, to listen therein for the hidden words of God. Complicating metaphorical, meaning-ascribing thinking is one strand in the task of reshaping theologies so that they resist violence. In contrast to the prevailing understanding of the omnipotent ordainer, we might also form various alternative images of the divine which untangle these troubled implications.

Dominant culture tends toward androcentrism—the belief that humans are and should be the center of the universe, the creatures of principal value, and the focus of the eye of God. Androcentrism, contributes to environmental crisis, animal abuse, and entitlement thinking. Instead, I believe it is quite possible that given a cosmos full of forces—some human, some divine, some geological, animal, or temporal—a deity might be unable to achieve all of the divine's highest aspirations and desires. Even an omnipotent ordainer might occasionally find it structurally impossible to find a violence-free path. The hidden meaning which H. Richard Niebuhr describes as "visible to those who know how to interpret the signs of the times,"⁶ may be hidden far more deeply than humankind can penetrate.

But in a social realm where humans make themselves into interpreters, a critical question becomes: In the context of intimate violence, what are the critical signs and who shall read them? In a culture warped by oppression, it is more than likely the socially dominant will read and interpret for the socially oppressed. Among other things, racism tends to function so that those of European descent feel entitled to assimilate and reshape the words of people of color; sexism, functions so that men will speak for women and ignore the transgendered; ableism, functions so that temporarily able-bodied people define and articulate the meaning of disability; classism, assumes that the wealthy write the story and circumscribe the possibilities of the poor; anti-Semitism, establishes that Christians incorporate and shape in their own image the theology of Jews; ageism, that the middle-aged speak for the young and the old; and heterosexism, assumes that heterosexuals ignore or fear the queer, and straighten all that they can. Feminist, womanist, and liberation theologies attempt to counter the cultural power of dominance; they are swimming upstream. Not surprisingly, they are commonly viewed as adjunct, political, and overly concerned with things beyond the boundaries of proper theological discourse. Proper theological discourse remains the expression of the dominant class.

Consequently, I am suspicious of theological motifs that endow violence with meaning because violence tends to be done by the powerful to the weak. I am suspicious of the meanings that emerge from an oppressive, androcentric, and violent context. The meaning that we attribute often centers on the self. Sometimes the scale is tipped toward self-aggrandizement, as many dominant theological voices seem to fear, but for traditional victims of violence, self-understanding tends toward a perception of personal worthlessness. Reinhold Niebuhr expresses a common motif in normative Protestant thought when he describes "the emphasis of Christian theology upon the inexcusable character of this [self] pride and the insistence that sin is rooted in an evil will."⁷ He links self-love with the very definition of sin in his description the "distinctively Christian conception of sin as pride and self-love."⁸

Feminist theologians such as Valerie Saiving have critiqued Niebuhr's theology as contrary and opposite to most women's experiences with regard to sin, love, and self-assertion. Saiving writes that "Contemporary theological doctrines of love have, I believe, been constructed primarily upon the basis of masculine experience and thus view the human situation from the male standpoint."⁹ In contrast to Niebuhr's belief, women are far more likely to lack sufficient self-love than they are to carry that love to sinful and negatively selfish lengths. When certain mainstream theologians attack such "sinful self-love," they bolster the expectation and intention that women remain passive, submissive, and self-deprecating. They encourage wanton self-sacrifice and support social inequality.

One task of uprooting oppressive systems involves undoing the split of self-perception where the socially marginalized tend toward self-denial and dominant groups commonly possess unquestioned self-love and the power to encourage feelings of inferiority among others. Instead, we might replace the dualistic worthy/worthless split with a model of self-respect that acknowledges both strength and weakness. We might hold self-affirmation together with further personal development, the possibility of wholeness and decency. We might understand ourselves as works-in-progress who are nevertheless beloved of and appreciated by our creator or creatress. Many traditional theologians use the language of "The Fall" to discuss the split caused by this dualism.

Violence as 'The Fall': Negotiating the Abyss after Paradise

The fall from grace is a common cultural, Christian & Jewish concept that resonates with and reinforces dualistic splits of good and evil, innocence and guilt. A story which has been largely incorporated into the thinking of dominant Western culture, the Fall occupies has shaped the received worldview

of many people in this society, regardless of their religious belief or disbelief. H. Richard Niebuhr describes the common project of: tracing the source of our present evil condition to some transgression in our past...the tendency... is so general that one is inclined to think that the idea of a fall is practically universal."¹⁰

I disagree with Niebuhr's assessment of this tendency as practically universal, but I do believe that Western dominant culture tends to posit a linear model of time that fosters nostalgia for a lost, romanticized past idyll which is never reclaimable and probably never existed. For many survivors—with the noted exception of those children whose first experiences and memories involved abuse—the concept of the lost, innocent past looms large.

Yet this lost past is not without moral meaning. The dominant description of Adam and Eve's exile from the Garden of Eden involve breaking God's rule. H. Richard Niebuhr continues, "we tend to place the blame for present wretchedness on some disobedience of our own in the past, or of our parents, or of our leaders of our nation, or of a larger society." Like paradise, which most believe irrevocable sealed to humankind after the first transgression in the garden, innocence often is unattainable to those who have lost it through rape, abuse, or violence. So it seems—but the metaphor already contains dangerous assumptions.

Leaving aside the problematic interpretations of sin in the garden of Eden, the prevailing story is one of law breaking. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because they broke God's commandment—because they tasted the forbidden fruit. Yet with rape, abuse, and violence there is law breaking, but it belongs to the violator. The person who is violated should not assume the taint of transgression. Too often, guilt by association is attached to the perceived loss of innocence. The experience of that loss—which should have nothing to do with law breaking on the victim's part—becomes associated with the dominant grammar of the Fall. A survivor's sense of having broken God's rule stems not from objective reality but the evocative metaphor that links paradise lost with having done wrong. Losing innocence falsely implies transgression, and often presses one into other unhealthy strategies like perfectionism.

Perfectionism as a Self-defeating Survival Strategy

In a context of belief where an all-powerful deity punishes the guilty for breaking the rules, perfectionism seems to function as a survival strategy. If we can only be good enough, we can attain safety. Obedient behavior should prevent calamity. We will behave, stay in line, be everything the divine might

ask—to keep ourselves from becoming victims once more. But the strategy, like the theological concepts that feed it, does not rest on life-affirming soil. Another section of “Beth’s Psalm” exposes the limits of the myth that we can be “good enough” to avoid violence. She asks, “Why did you leave me, God? Why did you let them do it? I was not doing anything wrong, I was being good. I was just a little girl.”¹¹ The myth of perfectionism reinforces the sense that survivors deserved violence, based on misbehavior or personal failings. This myth feeds a common evasion: had I only been good enough, I would have avoided violence.

Perfectionism may be an appealing strategy because it allows the survivor to retain some sense of control. Even personal blame may seem preferable to the alternative—that people who have experienced violence were largely powerless to prevent it. In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman writes “Guilt may be understood as an attempt to draw some useful lesson from disaster and to regain some sense of power and control. To imagine that one could have done better may be more tolerable than to face the reality of utter helplessness.”¹² But ultimately, perfectionism reinforces the perception of our own fallenness. As we aspire toward the heights of glory, we are reminded not of the positive elements of our personhood but of everything we have not and may never reach. In contrast to perfectionism, healing after violence is supported and furthered by the theological, cultural, and personal permission for making mistakes, even for disobedience. Perfection is not necessary, sufficient. Perfection is not attainable, and it does not guarantee protection. Sainthood is not a prerequisite for safety.

The Good, The Bad, and the Nothing-in-Between

Perfectionism and the fall from grace resonate with dichotomous understandings of good and evil. Dominant western culture tends to perpetuate and enforce rigid splits between heaven and hell, paradise and wretchedness, holiness and depravity. There is significant cultural pressure to categorize, split, and dichotomize—to stand on one side of the great divide.¹³ Because the reality of human experience does not map neatly onto the constructed terrain of good/evil, survivors may find themselves tormented by unexpected moral ambiguity. From this trouble springs the evasion: “But my partner loved me, even though he hurt me. He wasn’t really evil, so those truths about survivors (who were violated by real demons) don’t apply to my experience.”

This image of total evil may speak truly to some people’s experience. Yet for others, it belies the ambiguity of a relationship that was both violent and intimate. A relationship can include moments of love and moments of vio-

lence, which neither turns the violence into an act of love, nor submerges the love within the rubric of violence. But the predominant thinking about good and evil radically separates these two spheres and produces a landscape where survivors are pressured to collapse their relationship into a simplified caricature of evil, invalidating any affection, support, or love survivors drew from the relationship.

Because survivors may have needed or wanted the relationship for a variety of reasons, because they may be drawing some positive benefits from even a violent relationship, the confusion often deepens. Freda Briggs describes this confusion between affection and abuse, explaining that children often "accept the perpetrator's explanation that sexual abuse is what people normally do when they love each other. Pedophiles seek out children who look sad, lonely, and affection starved. They are noted for their capacity to tap into children's emotional needs... They derive satisfaction from every stage of the seduction process, devoting a great deal of time to potential victims, listening to them, inviting their confidence, boosting their egos and developing their trust and the trust of their parents. Victims then tolerate the most painful abuse as the price they have to pay for the relationship."¹⁴ For children or adults who found themselves needing or wanting parts of a violent relationship, memories of the ways in which this relationship was in some ways beneficial may prompt conflicting emotions or feelings of guilt and shame. But the presence of grace in the midst of violence does not make the violence unreal. Nor does an appreciation or desire for grace make the survivor responsible for violence.

Under duress, people often do accept things they would not otherwise find acceptable. In retrospect, these morally difficult choices may produce considerable guilt and questions about whether the survivor was complicit in or responsible for the violence. Judith Herman writes that shame and guilt "are not fully assuaged by simple pronouncements absolving her from responsibility, because simple pronouncements, even favorable ones, represent a refusal to engage with the survivor in the lacerating moral complexities of the extreme situation."¹⁵ Survivors may accumulate a memory of their own guilty knowledge for decisions, actions, or emotions felt and practiced. These are often survival skills, necessities for those who will endure violence, and yet they are difficult to hold in the face of pressure to be the perfect victim. The cultural tendency to demand total and unambiguous experiences—all evil or all holy—are distorted pictures of a far more complicated, multi-dimensional reality.

Tangled Love: Love is Not the Same as Sacrifice

Our culture's prevailing models of love are tangled up with violence, even outside the context of abusive relationships. Alice Miller questions this blend of love and violence, the kind of necessary rationalizations that allow violence to be understood for a person's own good. She writes that contrary to popular myth, "Love and cruelty are mutually exclusive. No one ever slaps a child out of love but rather because in similar situations, when one was defenseless, one was slapped and then compelled to interpret it as a sign of love."¹⁶ Consequently, we learn to accept a certain amount of violence as a natural part of love. Like the abuser who obscures and rationalizes unacceptable behavior through a blend of love with violence, dominating culture habitually twists up love with force or sacrifice, and encourages us to understand this blend as necessary or beneficial.

A common site of this twisting occurs in language about sacrificial love, particularly in the way the story of Jesus' death on the cross has been interpreted. Feminist theologians have critiqued the presumption that love is akin to self-sacrifice, that Jesus died as an innocent victim to take on humanity's sin. In their essay "For God So Loved the World?" Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker call out this dominant image. Brown and Parker write that "the central image of Christ on the cross as the savior of the world communicates the message that suffering is redemptive. If the best person who ever lived gave his life for others, then, to be of value we should likewise sacrifice ourselves...Our suffering for others will save the world...Divine child abuse is paraded as salvific and the child who suffers 'without even raising a voice' is lauded as the hope of the world."¹⁷ Cultures and theologies that praise sacrifice are breeding grounds for intimate violence. They create a context in which people—especially the socially less powerful—are expected and encouraged to give of themselves in order to be loved and to properly love.

Similarly, theologies that valorize loving one's neighbor cannot be adopted uncritically. In the Papal Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul II describes one of the foundation commandments of the New Testament ethic as "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."¹⁸ In common parlance, the lack of civility, harmony, and compassion often expressed between humans seems to point to our lack of obedience to this commandment. Some argue that present social difficulties stem from too much self-love, at the price of loving one's neighbor. Like Reinhold Niebuhr's castigation of self-love, theologies often attempt to foster other-directed love a way that feeds cultural patterns that demand women's self-giving and sacrifice. For women the landscape of self-love often looks more like a distorted portrait of self-abnegation. If the

commandment to love your neighbor as yourself shall be one of the principal foundations of an ethic of love, it requires loving the self as much as we aspire to loving our neighbor.

The Practice of Reflection: Love Yourself as You Love Your Neighbor

In truth, many of us do a better job of loving our neighbors that we do of loving ourselves. Often, even when we speak self-hate and frustration, and repeat culturally sanctioned lies to ourselves, we muster compassion and insight for our neighbors. Women, who hold themselves to blame for the violence in their lives do not always blame other survivors around them. Women often withhold personal forgiveness for their own choices and decisions in a violent, violated context, yet they still offer forgiveness and understanding to others. Still-wounded survivors staff crisis-lines, battered women's shelters, rape centers, hospital wards. Even when we do not love ourselves sufficiently and whole-heartedly, we often manage great love for those around us—for those whose stories in some way mirror our own. Ultimately, the practice of that compassion might still the evasions that happen in our own hearts.

In Jewish and Christian traditions, love of the neighbor is valued highly. In his text on Hassidism, Martin Buber reflects on the coupled practice of love of God and love of neighbor. Against the backdrop of the commandment to love one's comrade as one like yourself, Buber writes that "a zaddik of the fifth generation said of himself: How can I fulfill the command of love since I do not even love myself and cannot bear to look at myself?¹⁹ What do I do? I execute the turning so fully that I can again look at myself." The zaddik wondered how he might love appropriately, when he did not love himself. Buber describes the zaddik's process as a true turning to God, so that he comes to love himself in God. Through this turning, the zaddik becomes able also to help other people who come to him. The process of turning to God allows one to love oneself despite imperfections, which further makes possible the loving of others.²⁰

Yet for survivors of intimate violence, turning to God may also be fraught with difficulty. Survivors might turn toward others who have experienced violence. As healers and reflectors of other people's histories, survivors might find their own way toward a re-turning to the holy and to the self. Inverting the commandment might yield an even more fruitful ethic. We can draw the lessons of love from our highest aspirations toward responsibly loving other survivors. Survivors might hear the stories of their histories from the outside, asking themselves how they would respond if they heard someone else speak this story. We might make a practice of speaking to ourselves the words we

need to hear. We might attend to the ways in which we have better loved our neighbors, to teach ourselves the ways we could love ourselves.

For the process of healing after violence often seems daunting—undoable, impossible, unattainable. Living whole after violence seems like it will take a miracle, and after violence, faith is hard to find. Yet, our capacity to love other wounded neighbors realizes a part of that miracle. Feminists and other life-affirming voices have and are still reshaping the dominant language regarding intimate violence. Our foremothers and our daughters have and will refashion the meaning that violent culture hands us. We speak different words to survivors now than we did twenty years before. We hear different voices than our mothers heard, than our grandmothers heard, than their grandmothers heard. Our great-great-granddaughters will hear still other voices, offering them sustenance and healing in the aftermath of violence. That refashioning signifies the possibility of coming to love in a radically different way; it reminds me of holy possibility, even in the face of suffering and terror.

So when there seems no way forward for our own process of coming-to-terms, when our own healing seems beyond the borders of possibility, we might look to the ways the community of survivors/healers has treated what once seemed like unmendable brokenness. I believe in the working-out of that miracle because I have heard women speak truth to other survivors. I have heard survivors become healers when they tend to someone else's terrifying history. I have heard us untangle the mistruths and confusions that bind victims in misplaced guilt and shame and fear. I have heard this, so I know this miracle is in the process of becoming.

So this might be our aspiration: Love yourself, as you have loved your neighbor. Love yourself, as you have loved the girl whose cries stuffed themselves into a pillow sack for fourteen years; as you have loved the woman who took her bruises and her children into the night; as you have loved the man raped by another man; as you have loved the woman who ran from her husband, came back, and cannot run any more; as you have loved the child whose mother hurt her; as you have loved the young woman rewriting the story of her history; as you have loved your neighbor. May we speak to our own heart the words we have whispered across pillows, between door chinks, through walls of stone or fear, in the fractured landscape left after violence. For that tortured land is not all there is. We know this, because we are the crafters, shapers, co-creators of a land where violence is not the end of the story. We are the women, men, creatures traversing the long, slow circles out of fear and pain, and we are the ones who have and still carry others on our shoulders or in our hearts.

Love yourself, as you have loved your neighbor. One day, we will have carried others long enough that we will learn how to cradle our own bodies and histories. One day, we will travel in even better company—not just with our neighbors and strangers and with the holy, but also with our selves. One day, we too will see our reflections, hear our stories, and answer our prayers. One day, we will come back home.

Notes

- ¹ Niebuhr, H. Richard . The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy. pg. 67.
- ² ibid, pg. 67
- ³ Blumenthal, David. Facing the Abusing God. pg. 229
- ⁴ ibid, pg. 230
- ⁵ Sontag, Susan. Illness as Metaphor, pg. 3
- ⁶ Nieburh, H. Richard. The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy. pg. 67
- ⁷ Nieburgh, Reinhold. The Nature and Destiny of Man: Human Nature. pg. 188.
- ⁸ ibid, pg. 188
- ⁹ Plaskow, Judith. Sex, Sin and Grace, quoting Valerie Saiving, in Journal of Religion, April 1960, pg. 1.
- ¹⁰ Niebuhr, H. Richard. The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy. pg. 128
- ¹¹ Blumenthal, David. Facing the Abusing God. pg. 228
- ¹² Herman, Judith. Trauma and Recovery. pg. 53-54.
- ¹³ Goodison, Lucy. Moving Heaven and Earth: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Social Change. pg 1-4
- ¹⁴ Briggs, Freda. Developing Personal Savefty Skills in Children with Disabilities, pg. 7
- ¹⁵ Herman, Judith. Trauma and Recovery. pg. 69
- ¹⁶ Miller, Alice. Banished Knowledge. pg. 33
- ¹⁷ Brown and Parker. "For God So Loved the World?" in Violence Against Women and Children. pg. 37.
- ¹⁸ John Paul II. The Spendor of Truth. pg. 24-25. See also Matthew 19:19, Mark 12:31
- ¹⁹ Buber, Martin. Hasidism and Modern Man. pg. 244
- ²⁰ Buber, Martin. pg. 245

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Women's Spiritual Practices: Surviving To Graceful Living

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Why are you so enchanted by the world when a mine of gold lies within you?—Rumi

This paper will examine the gold mines of spiritual practices for women: why they are important, what they look like in everyday life and how to make them happen.

You might ask, why is this necessary? Don't men and women have the same spiritual needs? I can best illustrate the importance of this point by sharing with you a piece of mail I received--an advent tree from a women's center in New Mexico. It lists important female ancestors of Jesus; Eve, Hagar, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Tamar, Rahab, Naomi, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. I have always found this family tree of Jesus fascinating. Jesus had some real characters just like in our families. There was Rahab, by trade a harlot, whose bravery is recorded in the conquest of the promised land. Also Ruth and Naomi, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law whose commitment to each other transformed the pain of the exile.¹ This spiritual practice of reflecting before Christmas on the role of women was new to me. I see how important it is after doing the practice. For me, it reversed some of the negative messages about women which I had received in my religious education. Eve was presented as the temptress, not the hand of original blessing. Women have not been active participants in many religious rituals. Inclusive language is also a problem in many worship services.

Valiant Women Litany

Reciting a litany of valiant women can be a wonderful spiritual exercise. The inclusion of women from a variety of backgrounds is important as an expression of inclusiveness in this ritual. Miriam Therese Winter inspired

me to write this litany and acknowledge the contributions of women through the ages:²

Lydia
regarded in the early Church,
as a convener of prayer, a leader who proclaimed the Gospel
side by side with Paul,
a prosperous business woman who was a dealer in purple goods
and made her home and
resources available for the life of the early Christian Church:

Hail, valiant woman!

Bridget,
who founded Irish monastic
centers for men and women
in the fifth century,
leader in politics and ecclesial matters.

Hail, valiant woman!

Elizabeth Ann Seton
who in 1809
founded the Sisters of Charity
and was the first canonized woman in the
United States.

Hail, valiant woman!

Rosana Chouteau
North American Indian,
elected chief of the Osage Beaver Tribe
in 1875, the first female chief:

Hail, valiant woman!

Catherine Booth
outstanding revival preacher,
co-founder of the Salvation Army
in 1878.

Hail, valiant woman!

Pandita Ramabai,
a Sanskrit scholar
pilgrim and poet
who raised the status of women,
delegate to the Indian
National Congress:

Hail, valiant woman!

Florence Nightingale
who raised up nursing to
a profession
in nineteenth century England
and laid the foundation
for nursing as we know it today

Hail, valiant woman!

Mary Baker Eddy,
author, founder, healer, and leader
of Christian Science
until her death in 1910.
She established a metaphysical
college to teach spiritual healing.

Hail, wise woman!

Kathe Kollwitz,
artist and pacifist living in Berlin, Germany.
She died in 1945.
Her art portrayed aspects of maternal love, determination to
protect the young, and the pain of not being able to feed
children during the war:

Hail, wise woman!

Dorothy Day.

Founder of the Catholic Worker Movement in 1933,
activist for peace and justice.

You remind us to extend hospitality to the poor
and the outcast for there is Christ:

Hail, brave women!

Mev Puleo,

Witness of solidarity,

author and photographer,

bridge between the first world and the third world,

You encourage us to use the gift of wonder
and teach us that life is short.

She died in 1996 at age thirty-two from cancer but lived fully
her last years despite a deadly disease.

Hail, brave woman!

Venice Henahan,

mother and wife,

loving aunt and sister,

martyr from gun violence

who died unexpectedly

at Luby's Cafeteria, while

visiting Kileen, Texas before her granddaughter's

wedding. Challenging us as a nation to

face needless deaths from gun violence.

Hail, brave woman!

What is at the heart of spiritual practices for women? I believe these practices are about reclaiming self-esteem, and restoring dignity, and the ability to reframe, or free up new energy. Women reported in history have often been cast in a negative light. Eve is an example. Neither have we seen women's stories integrated into history. To be ignored and set aside is a terrible thing.

These spiritual practices could take many forms, as we have just experienced with the advent calendar and litany. Spiritual exercises, such as meditation, T'ai Chi, counting your blessings, imaging, setting "creativity dates," observing the Sabbath, tree planting, Saying "yes" and "no", hospitality, play-

ing music, and weekly information fasts are presented to get you thinking of your own spiritual exercises, and reflecting on why they are important to you.

Meditation

Some of these practices have preventive and healing dimensions. Heart disease is the number one killer. Two hundred and fifty thousand women die every year of heart disease.³ Angina, or heart pain, is caused by insufficient oxygen to the heart. Meditation reduces the heart rate and oxygen consumption can decrease 10 to 20 percent.

The following is an example of a meditation around the themes of heart and connections:

1. Sit quietly for several minutes. Focus on your breathing. Feel the air coming through your nose and down into your lungs. Exhale. Repeat this several times. Say the phrase-- "my body is calmed and relaxed" or-- "I am in the presence of God and safe."
2. Now focus your attention on the center of your upper chest, the area over your heart. Imagine a flower that represents love and compassion.
3. See this flower blooming as you breathe in and out through your symbolic heart.
4. Picture someone you care about and picture a beam of light as a manifestation of your loving energy--from your heart to the heart of this person.
5. Feel this loving energy in every cell of your body.
6. This can also be done with someone you don't like. See the divine presence in them.
7. Continue this meditation by refocusing on a dear friend with whom you wish to share the bond of compassion.
8. Close with one final, slow, deep breath, sending a ray of loving light to the other person and to yourself.⁴

Meditation has many advantages, one is the improvement of your health. In his research with cardiac and cancer patients, Dean Ornish recommends meditation to increase relaxation in the mind and body. Elizabeth Lipski recommends meditation for digestive wellness. She writes about the advantages of meditation in strengthening the immune system.⁵ Dr. Herbert Benson recommends meditation for decreasing blood pressure. In his studies, he finds that muscular tension is also reduced in the body.⁶

I see meditation as a way to connect with the deeper spiritual side of ourselves, and our higher power. In my own life, when I take time to meditate I find a calm in my day and I tend to be more centered.

T'ai Chi

The classic Chinese practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan can assist you if you have a hard time sitting still to meditate. Meditation in motion, this exercise method for health, self-defense, and spiritual growth, is graceful in movement, slow in tempo, and fluid in natural postures. For centuries it has been a part of Chinese culture for health and longevity. T'ai Chi harmonizes the energy processes within the body, and integrates the mind and body within the natural order of the universe.⁷

Counting Your Blessings

This exercise is at the heart of spirituality, a grateful heart. The world is full of abundance. This is true if only we have the eyes to see a smiling person, the beauty of a flower, and the freedom of a bird. To notice the understanding felt in a compassionate conversation, the good feeling when someone takes time to be with you, all these areas of life are the stuff of daily blessing. Everyday can be Thanksgiving. If I bless the world, the earth also blesses me in return.⁸

Imaging

Imaging helps to create a scene in the midst of your day. For example, while you are waiting for an elevator, you can use that time to get upset at the wait, or you can use imaging to think about Psalm 23. Imagine that you at this moment have a Spiritual Guide to shepherd you, and lead you to restful waters. Through the use of imagery, you can recall that vacation by the sea or a lake. Imaging of a peaceful scene can help us focus and slow down in our hurried world.

Creativity Dates

The practice of keeping artist dates can enhance your well-being. Julia Cameron defines the practice as a once-weekly, solitary experience with your "creative self" into new, interesting, and expansive territory. It might be a trip to the art museum, the aquarium, a used-record store, a concert, a drive in the country---anything that "fills your well." We may put off doing things that increase our imagination because we can't find someone with a like interest or

the time to go with us. This practice pushes us to step out and go to renewing places by ourselves.

Sabbath Observance

In a surprise best-seller of 1992, *The Overworked American*, economist Juliet Schor reported that work hours and stress are up and sleep and family time are down.⁹ Wives working outside the home return to find a "second shift" of housework awaiting them. Dorothy Bass, an author and historian of American religion, suggests we return to observing the Sabbath--that we take a day of rest after six days of work.¹⁰ This practice is grounded in the story of creation.

Tree Planting

Care of the earth is the responsibility of each of us. As we are hit by the reality that the quality of air is getting poorer and poorer, each of us needs to take action. Plants increase the oxygen in the air. Thomas Berry writes about the need to reclaim a reverence for the earth and a spirituality of a new ecology that needs to begin to function with efficacy now.¹¹

My husband and I began a Christmas ritual of getting a live tree and then planting it in our yard. The trees serve as a wonderful reminder of the memories of the gathering of family. And we help the environment. I am outraged when I see the careless attitude of many construction companies that have no regard for the trees when they begin building. Ripping out trees, and the raping of our land needs to stop.

A friend of mine plants a tree for each of her grandchildren. You might want to consider a ritual that has meaning for you and helps us improve the air.

Yes, No

Just as we wish to build, not destroy the earth, we can learn to be less destructive in our relationships. Having healthy boundaries in our relationships allows us to say "yes" and to say "no". We need to say "yes" to life and "no" to destruction. The book of Deuteronomy speaks of this practice:

*I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses,
Choose life so that you and your descendants may live. (Deut. 30:19)*

Many of us may feel guilty when we say no, but it may be a deeper yes to fulfill our present commitments.

Hospitality

Another important spiritual ritual is that of hospitality. None of us knows when we may be uprooted and cast on the mercy of others. This ritual affirms the goodness of taking people in, and providing the basic need of human shelter. In the traditions shaped by the Bible, taking in the stranger or guest is a moral imperative.

Music

I began looking at this spiritual practice with a reflection on Scripture. In the story of Exodus we are told:

"And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to Yahweh who has triumphed gloriously; the horse and its rider thrown into the sea"

This is a wonderful practice she models for us, remembering through song the sacred history of a people, and celebrating this liberation of the whole community.

Adding music to our world is a simple contribution. I play the hammered dulcimer and I see peoples faces lighten up when they think of music. When I am on my way to play and people see I have an instrument they look at me with joy and often ask what instrument is that? I played at a home for dementia patients, and their memories were stirred by the music. One of the residents is Jewish and the administrator was surprised when she belted out "Silent Night."

Information Fast

A practice that helps us get inside ourselves and gives us more space to be creative is what I call an information fast. For a week take a vacation from e-mail, CDs, reading, radio and favorite talk shows, and other television. We live in an age where we often get information overload, and we can experience some lifting of a burden and relief by taking a break from technology. Emptying our minds of numbing chatter, we find a deeper stream of ideas, insights and recognitions. We encounter our authentic selves, and hear our dreams with greater clarity.¹²

Summary

Spiritual practices can be a way to connect with God, others, and self. Spiritual exercises for women can reclaim the place women have in the world

of spirituality. It is a way to reframe some of the negative messages women have received in the past, use the present to create positive energy and create hope for the future.

Acknowledgments: This paper was developed from a presentation I made on "Reframing harmful cultural messages to girls and women," at the Soul 2 Soul II: Women, Spirituality, and Health conference, October 13, 2000 at Mills College, Oakland, CA and a version of it will appear in a forthcoming book, *New Women's Narratives: Integrating Spirit and Psyche* to be published by Haworth Press.

Notes

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Why Did I Get Ill?

Priscilla Stuckey, Ph.D.

Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.

— Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*

My essay chronicles a personal journey into the mystery, mindset, and encompassing experience of sickness back to health: an excursion through chronic illness, therapy, interrogation and self-blaming, the release of blame, and the gateway toward healing.

Throughout December 1989, I felt myself coming down with something. A little dizziness when I turned my head, a persistent burning in my eyes—I chalked it up to academic stress. Wasn't I preparing for the first comprehensive exam of my doctoral program? Just after writing the exam a respiratory cold hit, and I went to bed after Christmas.

But when the cold ebbed, debilitating pain set in to my lower back, followed by a high fever. I became frightened. What was this extreme heaviness in my body? I called the doctor and was reassured. A particularly nasty viral flu was making the rounds, with fevers even higher than mine. All I had to do was wait a few days and it would clear up.

But a week later I was little better. Muscle aches continued and I was so weak I could stand for only five minutes at a time. Over the next several weeks, I painfully recovered a little strength. I started studying again, and preparing for the next comp exam. But my eyes burned after only a few minutes of reading, and my mind wandered so that I could hardly comprehend words on the page. Long naps in the afternoon were mandatory, often morning ones as well.

I accommodated as little as possible to my weakness and pushed myself to

take the next exam. By the time I completed it, about three months after first becoming ill, the effort of keeping a normal schedule had pushed my body and mind past their limits. My emotions were volatile; I became angry whenever I exerted myself. My limbs sometimes moved according to messages I had never sent. I became disoriented with loud noises or bright lights. Still I believed I was merely recovering from the flu and that my recovery was being complicated by stress.

I stopped studying and eliminated deadlines from my life. The symptoms only worsened. Spring, my favorite season, came and went, but a Plexiglas wall separated me from crocuses and budding trees. I could read nothing now; at the bottom of each page I could not recall what I had seen at the top. The slightest grade in a sidewalk made my body feel like lead. Even the invisible settling of a house became perceptible; walking one direction through the living room was harder than walking the opposite direction.

It began to dawn on me that perhaps this was not stress. I consulted a specialist. Blood tests showed normal levels. After more months of ruling out possible diseases, he offered a diagnosis: chronic fatigue and immune dysfunction syndrome (CFIDS). Triggered by the virus, my body's immune system had gone into a state of hyperactivity, resulting in muscular and neurological dysfunctions.

The really hard work began after I received the diagnosis. Already sick for about six months, I had to contemplate being sick for far longer, since the illness was not abating. I slowed down my life even more. I pulled out the sofa bed in the living room and spent much of each day on it, trying to avoid being confined to the bedroom. I began to measure time, not in days and weeks, but in months, eventually years.

I entered therapy to cope with chronic illness. The therapist, a Jungian, had lined the walls of her office with shelves, and tiny figurines—animals, goddesses, warriors from around the world—stood at attention beside marbles, feathers and stones. These were a congregation of toys for use in a sand tray. I felt relieved to see these toys. I could not think, could hardly put words together in complete sentences, but images I could grasp. The toys welcomed me with their silence.

May 1990. I circle the shelves and pick out the toys that feel right. After placing some shells, pebbles, fossils, and pieces of wood in the middle of the sand, I circle again and choose two figurines. I set them on the edge of the tray in two opposite corners, overlooking the tray as if in blessing. I am curious about those figures, so powerful do they feel. One is a brass elephant-headed Hindu god. My therapist says he is Ganesh, Remover of Obstacles. The other is a cloaked, ebony female, the

Irish Saint Brigid, patron saint of, among other things, healing. I call them, from their far-flung corners of the world, to be present to my need.

To explain my glazed eyes and halting speech to colleagues, I would tell them of the illness, then watch them draw back a few inches. Like me, they too were frightened by my illness and the changes it was making in me. One day I met my faculty adviser as I inched up the hill toward the library. She asked how I was; I said I was having a relapse. She smiled brightly, advising me to get out in the sunshine and enjoy the summer. I said nothing. Bright light only made my symptoms worse. She, like nearly everyone else, could not comprehend my illness. I could not blame her; I did not either.

May 1990. I feel petulant today, sorry for myself for being sick. I didn't deserve this! I browse the shelves of the therapist's office looking for something soothing. I spot a tiny wooden wolf sitting on its haunches, head lifted in a perpetual howl.

I circle the shelves again. Tiny Florentine masks catch my eye. Their sky blue stripes are marbled with black. I pick up two masks. I don't know why I like them.

I go back to the animal shelves. I want something fierce now, something that growls. I find three white polar bears, then a small brown bear padding heavily on four feet, finally a black bear, front paw extended in threat. I pick up the five bears. They are businesslike bears. Maybe they can growl for me.

Now to arrange the figures in the sand. Suddenly I know. The wolf goes in one corner of the tray, as if backed there. Around it the five bears prowl, facing outward toward the world, protecting.

The masks I place in a far corner of the tray. My real face is hidden by illness.

The absurdity of my illness was as hard to bear as the symptoms themselves. Why did I get sick? Day after day the question burned through me. Maybe I had been working too hard. Or maybe I was straying from my spiritual path and the illness came along to remind me of the right priorities. Why did it happen? Before falling ill I had been happy, productive. I was a musician and graduate student; I ice skated once a week and lifted five-pound weights for fun and meditation. I enjoyed long talks with friends I cherished. My life was fun, rich, rewarding. Why now? What was I supposed to learn from it? Maybe I was sabotaging myself, afraid to succeed.

Most of the time I railed at such shallow reasoning. But they were the only clues to be had, and some days I grasped at them just because being sick was so preposterous.

Meanwhile, body and mind continued their dull rampage through a thicket of illness.

June 1990. I wake up this morning from a terrible dream. In the dream I sit in front of a mirror. I am naked. Stringy gray hair straggles from my forehead. My breasts hang limp and withered. Deep wrinkles crease the dry skin of my face. I am old, very old, and unhappy, for I have nothing to show for my life.

I wake up. Horror camps in the pit of my stomach. In illness, who am I? My success in the outer world really is gone. I cannot work, cannot achieve, and would not be able to care for children even if I had them. In the eyes of the world I am nothing, the way a withered old woman in our society is nothing.

Throughout the early months of my illness, well-meaning friends, unable to relieve the aches in my joints or restore my memory or give me their energy, would simply try to figure out what had gone wrong. The conversations that drained me most were filled with questions and advice: "Did you introduce any new chemicals at your house at the time you got ill?" "Have you tried Chinese herbs? They're so good for you." "Maybe you should go to an ACA (Adult Children of Alcoholics) meeting; they're for people who feel allergic to groups, like you seem to." Almost everyone offered a remedy, and when I responded that I had already tried that, they could offer only one thing more: "You were under too much stress, weren't you." It was no longer a question.

I understood they were trying to help, but I chafed at such incomprehension. Their questions only highlighted the words unspoken: "You can't have tried everything, because something would have worked." The responsibility for my illness, their advice implied over and over again, was mine. Sickness, they were saying, does not visit without reason. I must be to blame.

June 1990. In my therapist's office I talk about trying to take myself lightly. When it is time to make a sand tray I spot a small cloth doll. She looks Haitian, with black hair and dark skin. She is a mermaid, with a navy tail streaming out under a homespun white dress, and she is playing a tiny guitar. Next I pick up a hooded reaper dressed in gunnysack, then a miniature wooden mask of a crone with sharp teeth and straggly hair. A dancing bear, two shawled and long-skirted figures, and an Asian deity in red and gold complete the set. The bear, skirted figures, and deity go in the center of the tray, as if folk-dancing. I place feathers, like staffs of life,

beside each one. The black-skinned mermaid I set on the edge of the tray to serenade the dance. I identify with her; she's singing for her life. I place two feathers in the sand beside her.

But it is the reaper and the crone who fascinate me. They find their ways to opposite corners of the tray, like boxers in the ring. I find I do not fear the reaper. Intended to be grim, he wears instead a musty, monkish feel. It is the crone who is active and dangerous. I shrink from her gap-toothed mouth and scraggly hair. Strangely, even after the dream of last week, I do not recognize her.

Eventually I stopped talking about being ill. I restricted my contacts to people who simply accepted me, limited as I was, and offered their presence.

Still the question Why? hung over me, like thunderclouds in childhood, heavy and sinister. I experimented with every treatment I could find. Western drug therapies had no effect. Exercise worsened the symptoms. Bed rest made me bored and anxious. Biofeedback tapes brought on bouts of depression. Special diets left me feeling weak and deprived.

I grieved for the life I had lost. After months of being ill, I could hardly remember what it felt like to be capable. Some close friends stopped by one evening, and I sat in a chair listening to them as if from a long distance away. My muscles ached. I could not concentrate on what the friends were saying. I could hardly wait until they left. Would I ever feel vital again?

August 1990. Today I circle the shelves looking for animals, deities, people. Nothing wants to live in the sand. I sit down on the floor beside the box and begin kneading the sand, around and around in circles. The sand flows cool through my fingers, pleasantly resistant. Suddenly I see the pattern I am making: it is a tree, its trunk rising in the center and branching out on either side. Or maybe it is a woman's reproductive system, vagina leading up through uterus, circling around to ovaries. I like both images. Maybe someday my body will be strong again, rooted and vital as a tree.

After more months of illness, even the question Why? began to wear itself out. I focused instead on surviving. I learned to endure, and I learned also that endurance is not prized in a society that prefers to solve difficulties, not merely suffer them.

Near the first anniversary of my illness, I listened over dinner one night to Respighi's *The Birds*. The piece features a famous and hauntingly beautiful oboe solo, and at the first sound of it I began to cry. I had been an oboist before falling ill but, not having been able to sing or play oboe for a year, I felt

I would never make music again. My then-husband gently offered what hope he could. "No one knows why you got sick," he reminded me. "We don't know, doctors don't know, nobody knows what causes this illness, and all the speculations are just that—speculation."

A weight of responsibility began to lift from my shoulders. In that moment, I began to understand why I had needed so desperately to find the cause of this illness. I had believed that if I knew why I became ill I would know how to get well. I could learn what I had done wrong and undo it, or at least avoid doing it again. I'd believed I could control my illness.

This need to control, I came to see, has many by-products, and all of them work against healing. Obsessing about "why" is only the first of them, but it's pernicious in that it implies logic: illness has a cause, a reason, and a probable treatment. Researching the causes of disease is a fine thing, but in our frantic efforts to master illness through understanding and treatment, we lose sight of how it is, in the end, incomprehensible.

I began to learn the world does not easily conform to human reason. Antibiotics cure infection, yet they inspire new strains of organisms resistant to their attacks. New illnesses refuse to fit old paradigms. There is a wildness in the universe that skips just beyond our searching grasp. Then I realized that is possible—though few find it comforting—that illness and suffering simply are not logical. My own illness came out of nowhere. It resisted all conventional treatment, all meaningful interpretation. "Life is suffering," says the Buddha's First Noble Truth. No explanation.

When I accepted that the cause of the illness might not be mine, I began to view healing differently as well. Perhaps it was a gift, not the direct result of my efforts. The best I could do was what I was already doing: take care of myself, engage only in activities that energized and revitalized me, continue the inner journeys.

*December 1990. I am listening to the radio when a haunting choral chant begins. It is a four-part, a Capella setting of a familiar psalm, done with feminine pronouns. "The Lord is my shepherd, I have all I need... / She restores my soul. She rights my wrongs, / She leads me in a path of good things / And fills my heart with songs. / Even though I walk through a dark and dreary land, / There is nothing that can shake me, / She has said she won't forsake me, / I'm in her hand." And at the end, a new doxology: "Glory be to the Mother, and Daughter, and to the Holy of Holies. ..."*¹

I weep for the comfort of it. How familiar, how unfamiliar those words.

I began to lay down responsibility for my illness. The blaming assumptions of others, their unconscious cruelties no longer cut so deeply. I began to accept my illness. Of course I was still plenty angry about having my life taken away, but giving up control of both the cause and the outcome freed me to consider new possibilities.

An old belief system shattered. I realized how illusory was the notion held by the society around me, the one I myself had held before becoming ill: that health is normal and illness an aberration. I began to see some sense in the senselessness of it: if sickness could be controlled—by medicine, by willpower, by prayer—then sick people could all be blamed for their condition. As it is, lacking unfailing cures, we lack also any substance for our belief that illness is abnormal.

Yet many people are lucky enough never to have this belief shattered; their bodies work well for most of their lives, and they may never have to use their passport in the "kingdom of the sick."² But those of us who realize our dual citizenship can no longer afford the luxury of this illusion. Illness is normal, too. Like health, it is part of being human. Sometimes one is ascendant, sometimes the other.

Barbara Kingsolver, in her recent *Poisonwood Bible*, shows how culturally specific is the belief that physical limits are abnormal.³ In the novel an American missionary family is contrasted with its neighbors in the Congo. One of the missionary daughters watches a Congolese neighbor who is disabled propel herself with hands and arms along the ground, doing laundry, preparing meals for her family. The daughter reflects on how injuries and illness seem in that land to be simply marks of living, as if you are not fully adult if you proceed through life with a completely intact body.

I read the novel last year, a decade after falling ill with CFIDS, and felt a special gratitude that Kingsolver had called out that very American belief in physical invincibility. We have been taken in by the oldest assumption in Western society, traceable to the Greeks: that illness is a departure from the perfection of the gods. Or, in biblical language, that it is divine punishment. And I gave thanks all over again that my sojourn through the kingdom of the sick ended four years after it began, following months of gradual recovery.

I count the end of CFIDS as the spring day in 1994 when I realized I again needed hard, aerobic exercise, and I purchased a mountain bike. Since then I have biked throughout the hills near my home. I have hiked the Grand Canyon and skied in the Sierras. Recently, I put in weeks of manual labor doing construction on the slopes of my property. Daily I climb the hundred steps from the street to my home. I have never been stronger or healthier.

Still I believe that healing is a gift. Often people ask me what I did to

make myself well. I tell them I cannot take credit for it. Yes, I did much to assist in the healing. I kept a stubborn commitment to try new therapies and thus found ones that worked for me. Most of all, I dipped into the wildness. I pursued dreams and passions, the fuel of health, even when it meant sacrificing beliefs that were limiting or relationships that confined or depleted.

Yet my efforts by themselves did not heal me; they only made the space for healing to happen. Just as I did not cause my illness, so I did not cause my recovery. Healing is a mystery, and it chooses when and if it will visit my door. If I am wise, I will respect its freedom as I would that of a partner or friend. This mystery has a wildness no human reason can tame.

November 2000. I reflect on the figures I placed in the sand tray so many years ago. The ones who sat on the edges and the corners of the tray felt powerful then; I am still curious about them. I see now they were divine figures.

Ganesh, Remover of Obstacles, has become a constant friend. Two years into the illness I discovered a small, brass statue of him at a garage sale, and he has sat on my altar since. Brigid, patron saint of healing, is the Christian overlay on the ancient threefold poet and wisdom goddess of the Celts. But only this year did I learn about the black mermaid. It turns out that she also is a deity. In African voodoo she is Mami Wata, mother of waters, encompassing the whole pantheon of spirits.⁴

Making friends with this mystery is a lifetime job. Call them divine, those figures who sat singing, blessing from the sides of the sand tray. Call them wild, too, for in their realm why loses its oppressive force, lost in the vigor of the feral dance.

Notes

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- ² Susan Sontage, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978).
- ³ Barbara Kingsolver, *Poisonwood Bible* (New York: Harper Flamingo, 1998).
- ⁴ Sharon Caulder, "African Vodun: The Spirituality of a People" (Ph.D. diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, Carpinteria, CA, 2000).

Naturally Healthy: Divine Priestesses of Okinawa

Susan Sered

A growing corpus of evidence illustrates how women's subordinate status in a variety of cultures is exhibited in illness-causing social practices such as overwork, lesser access to food, the stress that arises from the absence of autonomy and from ongoing discrimination, complications of frequent childbearing and STDs, and infections and hemorrhages following genital mutilation or other dismembering operations (Lorber 1997: 14-15). Conversely, access to roles of social prestige and economic significance seems to have a beneficial effect on women's health (see Waldron 1991: 31 on India; Sered 2000 on Israel).

A most striking piece of evidence linking women's status to life expectancy comes from Okinawa (Japan). Although Okinawa is the poorest Japanese prefecture, suffering the effects both of American military occupation and Japanese political, economic and cultural domination, Okinawan women have the longest life expectancy of women anywhere in the world today. While Japan overall has ranked first in the world in life expectancy over the past decade, Okinawan women are particularly healthy and long-lived even by Japanese standards. The life expectancy of Okinawan women is 84.47 years, to 82.07 years for Japanese women as a whole (Okinawa Women's Report: 240).

This paper suggests that traditional Okinawan religious practices and understandings may contribute to the overall well being of Okinawan women. Okinawa is the only society in the contemporary world in which women are the official, acknowledged leaders of the mainstream religion. Priestesses embody holiness and divinity, receive food and money offerings from the community, and carry out rituals that are understood to safeguard the health and well being of all members of society. While the high status of women is most obvious in regard to religious matters, women generally encounter little discrimination, there are no popular beliefs about the inferiority of women's bodies or souls, and women are respected for their work as farmers, merchants, mothers, and ritual experts.

Drawing upon fieldwork carried out in the Okinawan village of Henza during 1994-1995 (see Sered 1999), this paper explores the Okinawan view that people are 'naturally healthy' -- that good health is the normative state of human beings who eat 'natural' foods and live in harmony with neighbors and spirits, and the Okinawan notion that priestesses embody 'good things' and health.

Naturally Healthy

Henza people pray to be healthy, that is all [that they pray for]. They don't pray for things like to be smart, just to be healthy. They pray for strong legs so as to stand, to be healthy, so that the legs can step on the ground.

- Mr. Shinya, Henza school principal

Despite the conviction that villagers are naturally healthy, on almost every occasion in which I asked a priestess or a lay woman for what she was praying, the answer was "health." In the prayers that I have recorded, the word "health" (kenko) is heard more than all other requests and wishes (such as for prosperity, peace, etc.) put together. The emphasis upon health reaches an almost absurd level in exchanges such as these:

- A few days after a funeral at a graveside ritual conducted by a male shaman-type practitioner I asked a group of women to explain to me what the man was saying in his prayer. "We don't understand the exact words, but," they said, "it is just 'you should be healthy.'"
- Dead People's New Year is a day on which recently deceased are visited at their graves, a meal is shared, and relatives pray. I asked a woman in her mid-thirties to tell me the words of her prayer. She answered, "I hope you are healthy."

Obviously, a dead person cannot be healthy in the sense that Westerners mean, just like priestesses praying only for health and nothing else makes little sense given the generally excellent health and outstanding longevity in the village. Health, for Henza villagers, seems to be a metaphor suggesting a diffuse and extensive sense of personal and social wholeness, harmony and easiness--being yasashii. Health signifies that people, things, and spirits are in an easy relationship to one another--not intruding on each other's turf.

Clearly, not all Henza villagers are mellow, harmonious people who never bicker, quarrel, argue, fight, feel guilty or jealous, or suffer from illness. Henza culture does, however, encourage its members to avoid the kinds of strong opinions that can lead to arguments, to avoid the kinds of absolute ideological stances that can lead to according more importance to rules than to relationships, to avoid the kinds of prohibitions which--when trespassed--lead to guilt, shame, recriminations and illness, to avoid the kinds of social trespassing that can lead to altercations, to avoid the kinds of exhibitions of status and hierarchy that can lead to jealousy, quarreling or accusations of sorcery, to look down upon war and violence, to cultivate a conversational mode that leads to agreement and compromise, and to respect a fairly wide range of exceptional (non-aggressive) talents and handicaps. This ethos is introduced when a baby is born and receives praise for being cooperative, reinforced through expectations of family, friends, and neighbors, and reflected in the non-hierarchical cosmology in which the boundaries between deities, humans, natural locations, and ancestors are always hazy and blurred.

Being Yasashii

[The new baby] is discharged from the darkness

It observes the light of the world

Thus helping the mother's life

The baby's birthing is celebrated

The baby born last night.

When it becomes about seven years old

I will have a horse barn [for a boy] / storage barn [for a girl] built

The baby is newly born into a prosperous world

It shall brighten the ancestors forever.

-traditional song sung at birth of new baby,

recorded by Mrs. Nae Hokama, translation

by Mr. Kanshun Okutara, both Henza residents

More than any other word, Henza villagers use the Japanese word *yasashii* (easy; easy-going) to describe their village ethos. This ethos has important implications for the ways in which gender is "done" in Henza. First, the cultural ideal for interpersonal interactions is one that men and women can equally hope to attain: being easy-going is not dependent upon musculature, freedom from the demands of pregnancy and lactation, or any other physiological (or perceived as physiological) characteristic. Second, a large range of talents and proclivities are respected and tolerated, both in men and in women. Neither

men nor women are limited to a small number of mutually exclusive roles, personalities, hobbies, skills, or so on. Moreover, those who deviate from common social patterns--including gender patterns--are not scorned or harassed. Third, absolute opinions or ideologies--including notions about gender--are less salient than specific relationships or interactions. Fourth, hierarchy--including gender hierarchy--is minor, and when it exists tends to be situational, temporary, fuzzy, and minimized. Fifth, cloudy social relationships are not experienced as problematic, and control of women (or women's bodies) is not used to create social order. And last, the notion that people are naturally healthy and that the human body is not polluted, painful, sinful or in need of moral, medical or cosmetic modification holds equally true for men and for women. Gender, when it is "done" in Henza, is done in a yasashii way.

Women and Presence, Men and Absence

Women are always home and don't do the dangerous jobs. Women are home raising vegetables and taking care of the children and the house. Men go out of the house and go to the ocean and then die, sometimes, and typhoon and die, and war and die.

-village woman

The work of priestesses is dissimilar to most of the models of religious leadership with which Westerners are familiar. Priestesses do not lead congregations in prayer, they do not pray for the sick, they do not teach, it would be inconceivable for a priestess to correct the behavior of villagers or fellow priestesses, priestesses do not officiate at weddings, deaths or any other rites of passages, and priestesses do not even select their successors or co-priestesses. The ritual work of priestesses consists primarily of a ritual sequence in which the presence of deity (kami-sama) is more fully concentrated within the priestess's body during a process of donning a white robe (the kami-sama's garb), the priestess "sits" in a place connecting her to her clan or community, and then receives and eats food offerings. Most of the priestesses' rituals are associated with fixed calendrical occasions, tied to the normal cycles of agricultural work and fishing.

Almost the entire ritual repertoire of Henza village is carried out by women: housewives, clan priestesses, shamans, village priestesses. The few rituals performed by men (ame tabore, shima kusara and hama ogami) share a clear pattern: All are (were) carried out at times of communal danger. All involve killing an animal and using parts of the animal for ritual purposes. Although women could cook the meat from the animals, killing was the job of men.

(Note that villagers do not make the categorical statement that only men kill animals, or that certain rituals are men's rituals and others are women's. The entire schema that I develop here rests upon my efforts to categorize and interpret village behavior; it does not reflect any sort of ideological or even perceptual schema advanced by villagers, and it does not lead to the development of rules or taboos.)

In a very broad sense, the ritual division of labor in Henza places men in the sphere of death-related rituals and women in the sphere of life-related (and especially food) rituals. For example, men have the key roles in burial rituals. According to Mrs. Shinzato, death rituals are carried out at low tide, whereas birth occurs at high tide. "That is nature's way that birth occurs at high tide. In those days people lived according to nature." Traditionally (and still today) pregnant women do not attend funerals. In the past men were not usually present at birth (although there was no prohibition involved). A village priestess emphasizes that she only does "the good things" and not "the bad things," and priestesses do not attend funerals.

Henza women work in agriculture which is life-producing and a steady source of food. Men work in fishing which involves killing and which is an erratic source of food (cf. Ito 1966). Women remain put doing land-based work in a culture in which the village and its environs are considered safe and healthy; men come and go doing sea-based work in a culture in which the ocean is considered dangerous, the source of disease and typhoons. Not only typhoons but also dynamite fishing injured and killed many fishermen in the past. According to one villager, "The fishermen would dive... without any equipment, and sometimes they wouldn't make it up when they came up to breathe, and if no one went down to help them, they died. Before the War we took the boats all the way up to the northern point of Okinawa. Sometimes people got fish hooks stuck in them. And flying fish sometimes attacked." Villagers constantly warned me to keep my children away from the beach because so many people drown, although the water is actually very shallow for a long distance from Henza's shore.

The association of men with death and absence in Okinawan ritual is particularly striking in comparison to the common, if often unconscious, association in male-dominated western (and some non-western) religions between women and death--and therefore with weakness, sin, danger, pollution, or inferiority (see, for example, Seremetakis 1991). "This partnership of woman and death [in western culture] articulates the gendering of absence in phallocentric culture--but it is by no means universal" (Jonte-Pace 1992: 21). What then are the socio-cultural circumstances that foster the woman-death homology? The force that constructs the association between women and death

is difference. According to Jonte-Pace, "The sameness of men and women is denied [in patriarchal cultures] in a discourse of difference focusing on woman as absence, a discourse which conflates woman with death and man with life" (1992: 22). This discourse is necessary, I would argue, because the very meaning of patriarchy is that men procure power over women's reproductive capabilities. Patriarchy flip-flops nature, proclaiming that men are the life-givers; patrilineality defines the father as the relevant parent; and male creator deities transpose birth into a male ability. In patriarchy, spiritual birth--the birthing that is done by men and male gods--becomes the true birth, the birth that saves from feminine death (see, for example, Delaney 1991). The data that I gathered in Henza validates Jonte-Pace's conviction that the woman-death homology is culture specific. As an ideological expression of difference and domination, it has no place in Henza's non-hierarchical culture where both parents are believed to contribute equally to the child's being and in which the many deities are not clearly gendered.

As we have seen however, there is in Henza some sense of an association between men and death or absence, and this association does demand clarification. The interpretation given by villagers lies in men's subsistence work, which involves danger and sustained physical absence from the island. Men's absence explains, according to villagers, why men cannot manage to keep up ritual dance groups in the way that women can, and why they do not know as much about Henza ways as do women.

In Henza discourse, women's presence and men's absence are not portrayed as either good or bad, and they carry no ideological underpinnings or hierarchical implications. Although men are provisionally associated with death and absence, no one would claim that this association is universal, eternal or natural, and no one would claim that women are better than men. What women are is more present than men--an understanding presented by villagers as an empirically obvious demographic reality linked to specific subsistence conditions. When priestesses say that they do not get involved with "bad things," they do not mean evil, polluted, or inferior things; rather, they mean things that are out of place or out of equilibrium. Villagers understand Henza to be a good, healthy, self-contained island. Men, however, leave the island and bring back with them disease, money, foreigners, competition, sake--all kinds of things that disrupt village harmony. Men's rituals are not existentially 'bad' rituals just as men are not existentially 'bad'--neither men nor women suggest that there is any kind of hierarchy or ideology involved in village ritual. Rather, men--whose work is involved with outsiders, danger and killing--carry out the very few rituals that deal with disruptions of the natural and normative state of social and bodily health.

In Henza, life and death are not dichotomous, death is not understood to be an existentially bad state, and there is no matriarchal hierarchical ideology that can be served by promulgating a model of male inherent evil. Quite to the contrary, several villagers made a point of telling me that unlike people in other countries, Okinawans are not afraid of death because they know that when they die they stay in the family (on the ancestor shelf and in the communal family tomb). I was also told, on a number of occasions, that it is not always clear if someone is really dead: that people assumed dead and placed in tombs "often" wake up and bang on the door of the tomb, and that people who have disappeared at sea for decades "maybe are dead, but I don't know for sure." The men/absence/death complex that I have explicated, then, is mitigated by a feeling that neither death nor absence is an absolute state.

Unlike the ocean where the men do their work, the women's village is life-oriented: Violence and war are deplored, natality rates are high, virginity is not a cultural value, there are no birth or menstrual taboos, children are welcomed, life-expectancy is long and long-life is celebrated at lavish rituals for people who reach their eighties and nineties. In Henza, women excel at creating the enduring social bonds that make life and culture possible. Yet, and I stress this point above all others that I have made, what I call women's presence and men's absence is uniformly explained by villagers in terms of ecological pressures: the absence of sufficient farming land on their particular island. Women's presence and men's absence are never--at least as far as I can ascertain--interpreted as reflecting essential, existential or universal differences between men and women. Rather, men's fishing and women's farming, like men's ritual dealings with death and women's ritual dealings with life, are equally necessary and equally prestigious components of a cultural ethos of gender complementarity.

It Comes Naturally

The term used for 'priestess' in Henza Village is kami-sama, the Japanese word for 'deity.'

Susan: Tell me about yesterday's ceremony [at which you officially began to "sit" in the role of a priestess].

Mrs. Hamabata: [gestures to the top of her head with her finger.]

Susan: The kami-sama went into your head yesterday?

Mrs. Hamabata: Yes.

Susan: How did it feel?

Mrs. Hamabata: I feel that each person has a shugo-shin [one's own guardian 'god'], I felt that I have shugo-shin.

Susan: What did you feel at the moment of the ceremony?

Mrs. Hamabata: Spirit [rei] being stuck to me, like spirit covering me. My body and head were kind of floating.

Susan: Is the world lighter today than it was before your ceremony?

Mrs. Hamabata: Yes, very. I am in perfect health. I told my husband today. I went to the sacred grove yesterday and it was raining and I sat with my knees bent. Usually that would make me be sick and sleep the next day. But not today! Look, the kami-sama is protecting me. I really appreciate it. Later today I will pray at the hinu-kan (fire deity): 'Thank you that everything went smoothly yesterday.'

Susan: When you become kami-sama does your behavior change?

Mrs. Hamabata: Yes, there must be some change. Like how you dress, you must be careful, so that other people will make comments like 'Oh yes, she must be the one!' In your personal life you must change. You must do the kami-sama's way things, and pray at the ancestral altar. There is some change. In my family, even my husband will make a small change.

Susan: Do you have to learn special prayers and things now that you are kami-sama?

Mrs. Hamabata: It is not that you must learn these things, it comes naturally. If you sit in the position, the kami-sama will tell you, you don't need to study it. (my emphasis)

Mrs. Hamabata's final comment is crucial. When I spoke to her before the ritual in which she took on the kami-sama's role, she had stressed to me that she does not know anything about being a priestess, that she needs to

study, that she wants to ask the village headman for historical records of her clan. Now, as a priestess, she has come to a truer understanding of the meaning of the role. She does not need to study from external sources; the source of knowledge is now inside of her.

That the priestess's ability to pray comes naturally is the predominant opinion in Henza. For example, according to Mrs. Shimojo, "If you sit there [in the kami-sama's position], you learn what type of prayers. It comes naturally." Mrs. Adaniya explained a bit more, "I wear the kami-sama clothes on top of my own clothes. If you wear kami-sama clothes and sit there you naturally know what to say. I sit there and light incense and say that 'Today is...' and then the prayer naturally comes. It keeps coming. Smoothly." An outsider can of course see that a new priestess like Mrs. Hamabata has models from whom to learn at least some aspects of the role; someone taught her how to make and tie the ritual white clothes worn by kami-sama, and she saw other priestesses praying and performing rituals. The point is the cosmological stance expressed in these remarks. Because the priestess becomes kami-sama she now "knows"; the necessary information comes together with her new identity; she does not have to be taught.

Although becoming kami-sama is a "natural" process, the kami-sama's accession takes place in a communal setting after her position has been validated -- usually over the course of several years -- by a series of shamans and by the entire clan. The kami-becoming of a priestess is embedded within a highly social framework, and I close this paper with a conversation with a veteran priestess about the communal context of Mrs. Hamabata's initiation ritual. We discussed the reciprocal pouring of sake in which members of the clan, beginning with the clan dignitaries, poured for her and she, in turn, poured for them. (Note that in Okinawa, as well as in Japan, reciprocal sake pouring signifies the consolidation of social relationships; note also the references to health.)

Susan: Why is so much sake poured by the clan at the celebration?

Priestess: It means 'gambatte kudasai.' Please do your best for the clan. Because, for example, if you are driving a car, you ask Mrs. Hamabata to pray for no accidents, for the clan, so that is why they say gambatte kudasai.

Susan: Is there meaning to two people pouring sake for each other?

Priestess: In this case, gambatte kudasai. She pours sake back to say, 'I will be

careful of my health so that I can pray for your health, thank you for coming today.' It goes both ways.

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Workplace Altars and Other Forms of Practical Spirituality

Pat McHenry Sullivan

In 1976, I accidentally discovered that many workers keep spiritual items in their desks. While seeking correction fluid at a temporary job, I found a book on Buddhism and a Bible. At another desk, an inspiring quote on beautiful paper fell out of an expense file. During hushed conversations, co-workers shared what they hid in their desks and their hearts. Today, spirit has come out of hiding places in desk drawers and onto desktops. Some workers select and use devotional items with such care that they create altars. Conferences and discussion groups on spirituality at work have become common; so are books and articles on the topic. My essay reflects on how individuals live their spirituality daily in places and spaces of employment. Specifically, I focus on workplace altars, prayer, and creative symbolism.

Altars are a natural response to the need for respectful reflection wherever we are -- at home, in a temple, in the woods, at work. They can last many lifetimes or be temporary and spontaneous. "Stop here long enough to consider what matters," altars invite. "Reconnect here to the wonder of life. Gain strength and guidance."

Because of business practice and labor laws, workplace altars need to be discreet. The underground workplace of Patsy Attwood, a station agent for the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit System, is an example. You could walk by and never notice how she has altered her space to integrate faith and work. Plants and flowers enliven Attwood's glass-walled booth. Whenever she enters her space, she blesses it.

On her phone console, a prayer she wrote helps her live her values moment to moment. Attwood's inner work helps her deal better with job stress, like an angry customer whose ticket would not work. "When he approached me with an eat-you-up attitude, my stomach instantly jumped," she said, "like it does in an earthquake."

As the man stepped closer, Attwood prayed, "Lord, help me," and meant

it. Inner turmoil turned to peace and she felt as if the arms of God surrounded her. She then dared to ask the customer to repeat his problem in fewer words, but a lot more quietly so she could hear him better. Surprised, the customer relaxed and she fixed his problem. Later, he sought her out. "I don't know what you did, but after I talked with you," he said, "my day was great."

"Whatever we put in our workspace can have a profound affect," says William S. Johnson, a Santa Fe businessman. He notes that many executives have "ego walls" filled with photos and trophies designed to impress people. Others use their space for enrichment. "Sometimes altar artifacts provide icebreakers to initiate meaningful conversations between strangers." Johnson keeps a Bible at his desk and uses it often, but he has never seen a religious text on anyone else's desk. "I see more religious symbolism in New York City taxicabs than I ever see in corporate offices."

That, according to managers and labor lawyers, is fitting, for individual's rights to practice spirituality at work are balanced by other employees' rights to practice different values and the company's right to conduct business. An unspoken etiquette is evolving: in private space (desk drawer or a section of desktop that faces away from visitors), it's usually acceptable to place small symbols of a particular faith. In more public space, including office walls and desk sections that face visitors, employees need to be careful not to make others uncomfortable.

Many workplace altars begin instinctively. During a hard time, Brenda Fuller, a Washington, D.C. legal secretary, placed a prayer by her telephone. Later, she placed more prayers in tiny frames on her computer monitor stand. People on the go also have altars: inside his locker, a firefighter posts meaningful words and pictures; a meter maid keeps devotional materials in her truck; so does a carpenter, who also blesses his tools and each task.

The PBS documentary "Jane Goodall: Reason for Hope" shows ecologist Goodall carrying four symbols of hope wherever she goes: a leaf from a tree that survived the atomic bomb in Nagasaki speaks to the restorative power of nature; chunks from the Berlin wall and the South African prison where Nelson Mandela and his comrades were incarcerated call forth the power of the human spirit to overthrow injustice; a stuffed toy chimpanzee touched by attendees at Goodall's workshops, spreads laughter and hope among people throughout the world.

The documentary did not use the word "altar," let alone "workplace altar." As Goodall spoke about each symbol, however, faces in her audiences glowed. There was reverence not for the items themselves, but for the spirit they evoked, and that is what altars everywhere are about. When asked why

they maintain workplace altars, most people say something on the order of "I don't want to leave my values in the parking lot. I want to act on them throughout the workday."

Workplace altars are just one manifestation of practical spirituality. Whatever our particular faith, we do not want to just talk about it. Whether we are shopping for groceries or planning a birthday party, we want to do it consciously so the result is more ethical and meaningful.

Every faith tradition has much wisdom for practical spirituality and increasingly we are willing to incorporate insights and practices from other traditions. From Islam, all of us have much to learn from a ritual of prayers throughout the day. From Judaism, we can learn the power of praise and of celebrating the laws that bind our communities together in integrity. Christianity is filled with stories of compassion and of the promise of redemption from even our most awful faults. Buddhism has practices for quieting the noisy mind and for hearing the still, small voice that can guide us to right livelihood. Hinduism offers many yogas or paths to God, including the call to work as if for God. From tribal and pagan religions such as Native American teachings or Wicca, we can discover both our responsibilities to the web of life and the joys of living in harmony with all Creation.

My dad, who taught me that creativity is both a gift from God and a call from God, believed that if you really want to know what God is like, all you have to do is get out into the world, open up your eyes, and pay attention. One of his favorite spiritual moments happened during a college freshman biology class.

"We were studying a mold that grows on horse manure," he said. "Under the microscope, we saw stunning patterns that were growing so fast we could almost see the source of life within them. Every now and then the light would hit in such a way that everything sparkled, just like one of those round, stained glass windows in the Washington National Cathedral."

Decades after seeing the horse manure mold, Dad could not tell his story without reawakening the awe of the moment. "All around me, people were making crude remarks -- and believe me, students in the 30's could be just as raunchy as kids today. But I was transfixed. I remember thinking that if there's that much beauty hidden in horse manure, then there's got to be a God with a great love of beauty..."

After pausing to wink, he'd continue, "... and a sense of humor."

Sexuality, Spirituality and Health: Six Poems and an Introductory Essay

Christina K. Hutchins

Sexuality, Spirituality and Health

'S^exuality' and 'spirituality' are not disjoined ways of being in the world. Rather, as practices, orientations, events, or behaviors, they share a capacity for 'health,' for what the poet Denise Levertov has called a "fidelity of attention,"¹ a vivified awareness, an awakening to what is. Commonly conceived of as general well-being or as freedom from physical disease, health can also be understood as participation in the process or fidelity of attention. This attention is no passive activity but involves an active opening, a participatory receptivity to and an extension of the relational dynamics of reality. The dynamics of reality that are received and extended by such acts of attention include those we have habitually understood as discrete and separable, such as 'nature' and 'culture.' Thus as I write these words, the humming, buzzing, shaking-the-world new-green fronds of the California pepper tree, roaming a March breeze outside my window, enter the event of this moment intertwined with traffic sounds, a bus pulling away from the curb, and with the scent of frying onions, what will be supper for neighbors whose names I have never learned. This moment cradles many pasts as well as the yet-to-uncurl, always-plural fronds of future possibility.

For me, it is through the making of poems that I come to know most fully this health, this participatory process of paying attention to the intimate event of the present moment. The making of poems offers an opening (an image of both sexual and spiritual receptivity) to the felt inseparability of reality. In crafting that attention through the medium of language, a particular set of portals or trajectories are effected toward the future, the unmade, the yet-to-be. This future-affecting dimension of attention, however limited by what already exists, houses agency and power. The future blooms differently de-

pending upon the focus and degree of our attention. Thus how we pay attention, how we make the poems of our lives matters. To enact health, to participate in this receptivity and extension of reality's intimacies and intensities, is practice, gift, privilege, and responsibility: an unfurling work, inseparably of spirit and of flesh.

The Poems: Contexts and Connections

The following six poems, excerpted from a larger group of poems read at a workshop of the Center for Women and Religion's "Soul 2 Soul II" Conference in October 2000, loosely assemble themselves around the theme of "sexuality, spirituality, and health." Rather than offer an extended formal theoretical statement, I prefer to offer here, as I did at the conference, some contextual remarks that relate the theme(s) to each of the poems, inviting the poetry itself to draw multiple and indeterminate trajectories through its readers. The comments, written in retrospect, after the poems' completion, trace the impulse of creation to particular strands of connection. Of course, the risk is that writing critical blurbs about the poems creates an impression that these poems are rational, calculated acts, rather than aesthetic events and series of decisions that have happened to compose themselves as they do.

daughter

for M.

...gender proves to be performative...

gender is always a doing.

--Judith Butler, Gender Trouble²

Under a cluster of Monterey pine a small child
neither girl nor boy
stands in long grass
verdant green,
her fist or his fingers
stuck into a plastic bag of Cheerios.

The child looks up-- I think now

she is a girl and this is how
 it matters-- her calm face
 tips toward the high boughs
 where her mother
 hand to knob foot to branch
 climbs, limberly

pulling them both
 to some new place
 where the view expands.
 The child hand in mouth
 in the deep shade
 notices.

Walking past I feel
 with sweet and certain tap
 of my feet on the pavement:

this moment will become her.

The first poem "daughter" has three sources or strands of connection of which I am aware. The first was an actual girl, a toddler, standing on an actual piece of earth-- the grassy hill under the Monterey pines on the grounds of the Pacific School of Religion. Her mother, a PSR student, was climbing the tree, and the child stood watching, absorbed in her mother doing that work/play. *Oh, this is possible!* Because we live in a severely gendered world, her mother's action becomes an action of what is possible for her own life. So the second source-strand for this poem, indicated by the epigraph, is the work of theorist Judith Butler, for whom gender is both "always/already," that which pre-exists our own becomings, and into which we are conscripted; at the same time, an experience of constantly repeated imitation. Because gender involves activity, the making of a copy of a copy, rather than living out something 'fixed,' 'essential' or 'inherent,' it can be done differently. At least to some extent, the copying process can be deviated from, subverted.

For women throughout the world whose lives, loves, and notions of possibility are severely constrained by conventional gender categorizations, an understanding of gender as iterative and imitative-- constructed-- may mean it can be 'done differently.' A crucial question becomes *how* we iterate or become and how we pay attention to the texture of reality in the midst of the cultural constraints that frame our lives. As Alfred North Whitehead writes,

"*how* an entity becomes constitutes *what* that actual entity *is*."³ The 'how' of our lives *matters*, becomes us and becomes our children's sense of possibility. Finally, this particular poem honors and celebrates my own mother, who before I began first grade, took me on frequent weekday "tree picnics" while my brothers were at school. She and I clambered up and sat in the crotches of pines and elms, swung our feet from black walnut boughs and munched cheese sandwiches. Those experiences, which form the third source-strand of the poem, are sedimented, layered, embodied in me now. One way I know health, know what it is to actively participate in and extend the motion of actuality, know my sexuality and spirituality, nature and culture as inseparably conjoined, has come through my knowledge of the roughness of bark, of my own muscles pulling me to the next branch, through noticing how the world looked and felt different from a different perch, the grassy ground of a San Jose city park-- a ground I'd assumed I knew-- become distant and unfamiliar. To this day, the disorienting sense of a tree climber is one I seek to widen my imagination and shift worldviews.

Voiceless

for J. J. and for the people of Mira Vista United Church of Christ, 1994

1.

For three days
a raw lump of fire
smouldered in my voicebox.
We set up a codeC
husband and wife,
we were used to talking
kitchen to living room,
bathroom to bedroomC
one clap yes, two claps no.

You called out after supper,
putting dishes in the sink,
"Want some decaf?"
I clapped once.

2.

*Come beside this window.
Sometimes a sharp line
cleaving sunlight and shadow
crosses the floor of our lives.*

I sat and lay on the couch,
on the floor,
wondered if my voice
would ever come back,

and do it by Sunday
when I had to preach
the keenest words of my ministry—

*Someday, years from now, people
will want to know— they will be
lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight: Did we dare
step into visibility and voice beside this open window?*

*The quality and openness of love
in their lives will be affected
by where you and I
decide to stand.*

I watched clouds
come and go,
swirling masses of wounded light
and turning shadow
carrying time,

whole breezes of spring storms
passing over and around—

*This window of opportunity also frames a time of judgement:
for a Christianity that hates homosexuality
or any other mutual human love,
is simply not Christianity anymore.*

3.

Sunlight walked the wires
and ran, shimmering green,
spanned the square spaces of quivering
screen, the window wide open
while my friend's fingers poured timbre and tone
between those rolling lines of quick sun,

her improvisations washing me, voiceless
as I lay under
the piano, my palm flat
against the soundboard,
all that music running
down my arm
humming my bones.

4.

That was in the afternoon.

In the evenings you and I
kept going
by whispers and handclaps.

I was sick and expected
nothing and life fell into me
lucid and cloudy,
a strange ecstasy
ringing through my silence
like bells and hammers
marking all the time
in the world,

sunlight, vivid
 in the spaces of that clean mesh,
 laughing, sobbing, screaming, up and down,
 pulsing with music
 or the breeze,

I couldn't tell.

"Voiceless" and "The Gaze" are both 'coming out' poems. From 1992-1995, I served as minister with a United Church of Christ congregation during a time of growth and immense change as the church moved through discussions on sexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality, culminating in a vote in 1994 to become an 'Open and Affirming' congregation. In the midst of that process, my own issues of sexuality emerged and began to move, too. In the midst of clarifying and publicly articulating my spiritual commitment to the freedom of mutual human love, my own body began to dispatch unmistakably clear messages, and I listened. My ex-husband and I separated after a long (15 year) and companionable (and now I know restrictive and lonely) relationship. I grew strongly attracted to my closest woman friend (who is now my sweetheart). "Voiceless," written in the midst of those motions toward/into integrity, is a poem of listening. In some ways, a statement of illness as much as of health, "Voiceless" attests to the inseparability of sexuality and spirituality. While "Voiceless" springs from that fragile, fractal moment *before* voice arrives, even to the self, it also emerged during a bout of severe laryngitis, a literal voicelessness. Written the same week and excerpting from the 'Open and Affirming' sermon I preached for my congregation,⁴ the poem materializes the agony and irony of proclaiming for a community that which I could not speak for myself.

The Gaze

*Unless all the potency, and the difference (?) were displaced into the gaze(s)?...
The gaze is at stake from the outset.*

--Luce Irigaray⁵

scopophilic: taking pleasure in looking

two women on a curb
waiting for the light
to change

their summer dresses
unreserved with sun liquid
of fabric wet in wind

a bevy of pigeons
rises and settles wings spreading
glints of muscadine and green

the women stepping forward
their skirts
fill the street

I was like them and could be again
my waist small
as seven fists

but softer
and laughter still on my face
the being noticed the fabric

that billow and sheen
and shimmering through
the wrapping and release

but in my trousers

my white shirt and vest
behind a sloped glass windshield

I am the same
as yesterday
and different

It was I who pressed the brake
stopped traffic
and not only for the lives

but for the passing by :
the women's faces
carriage of shoulders

sweep of arms swing
of dresses
the settlings and risings of wings

"The Gaze" of course refers to the artist's gaze, a gaze that encompasses the 'other' and kindles the power of a maker. For me, coming out as lesbian and coming out as poet occurred simultaneously-- no accident as both involve claiming and creating space through motions of voice. Accompanying the aspect of voice is that of the gaze-- the freedom of the gaze and the aggressiveness of the gaze. If fidelity of attention is participatory, then health is not

about a receptivity that is passive, but one that is active, aggressive, agential, relationally affecting the world. Daring to take the world as my own rather than simply being taken by it, "The Gaze" realizes with a great jolt of joy the aggressiveness and freedom in claiming the gaze.

Afternoon Wetness

Afterward in the shower
water swirling unseen
talking itself down the drain
toward a spinning dark,

drops beading your narrow shoulders,
your whole face opened
with your chatoyant eyes
blinking.

Every muscle of your back
a link, round of shorn skull summer
brown curve of neck your lashes
a windrow of autumn grass
stung with rain--
tipping lids
two palms of breast
all having passed under
and emerged.

Then I was under the round head,
and still water stretched
taut down your long thighs.
From your knees' fine bones
flung streams of twisted light
fell and fell.

I nibbled water
from ridged roots of clavicle
sharp arch of scapula,

drank at your neck's small glen
a secluded spring
tapped hollow and full.

You were familiar and foreign as bread
risen and baked and held in the hand
daily,

each time new
each hunger fresh.

The water came and came,
a flood we collected
slapping into the reservoir we
make of ribs and breasts
arms pressed round.

We filled clean with the water
with the comings
clasp and release
fitted bodies
wet joys that lift and leap
spin darkly out
return to unseen worlds,
and remain--

Hours later
toweled dry clothed
standing in dusk rain
searching a bakery window for tomorrow's breakfast,
I raised my fingers
pushed back the hood of my coat,
caught the lingering scent--
your wet risings
gleaned by my hand.

Prior to coming out, the predominant mode of both my sexuality and my spirituality (and the theme of many poems) was longing. Anticipation and yearning, marks of the season of Advent, carried for me the most intense religious and relational impulses. I lived eschatologically. Longing, nostalgia for a sense of belonging, and restlessness, a lived sense of homelessness, all pointed toward the perpetual incompleteness of human life, and all pointed away from the here and now, toward somewhere else. The poems "Afternoon Wetness" and "The Periodic Table of the Vegetables," are both love poems, not of nostalgia or restlessness, but poems of the realized possibility of longings fulfilled. They are poems of satiation, of the inseparable, overflowing motion of bodies, love, spirit, and ordinary days. They are poems of touch. Just as 'openness' portrays both sexual and spiritual receptivity, 'touch' is a primary image for both sexual connection and spiritual engagement. These, too, are poems of belonging, of finding a home--not only in the lover's arms, but in the world.

In "Afternoon Wetness" the final image is one of 'gleaning.' I have seldom written explicitly 'religious' poetry, that is, poetry deliberately utilizing categories of God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, or poetry that deliberately quotes or engages scripture. However, I am an ordained minister; I have lived beside, with, and in progressive Christian institutions most of my life; I am steeped in scripture and in Christian community; thus, religious imagery and language are part of the sediment I bring to all I do, including my poetry. The final line of "Afternoon Wetness," 'gleaned by my hand' is evidence of that scriptural resonance. 'Glean' was not a purposefully chosen word, but one that found its way into the poem. When I reflect on that, I think of Jesus taking his hungry disciples to glean grain at the edge of a field on a Sabbath. And there emerges a bit of the magic of writing a poem--how what one feels, what one intends to make, sometimes finds its way, through the how, through the medium of language.

I wrote the poem seeking to laud the satiated fullness of the love it portrays, and needing to say something else, too, something I had not articulated yet to myself. Through the phrase 'glean by hand,' the poem commemorates, as does the story of Jesus and the disciples, what it means to be fed in, by, and through the breaking of norms. To glean and to pluck grain by hand on a Sabbath were forbidden.⁶ The knowledge I needed to tap through the poem had something to do with the excessive lingering of satisfaction and the exquisite sense of belonging arising through the non-normative sexual encounters between two women. Echoing the scriptural accounts, the poem claims, *this is what it feels like to be hungry and to be fed, and in that feeding to belong to a world where people matter more than rules and norms.*

The Periodic Table of the Vegetables

for Sally Balmer

Around your table not again but for the first time
with your family, not the table but
sprawled on living room couch and chairs, we laugh
over wine, not wine but diet pepsi

Anyway, we talk about vegetables. Starting with
the A's: I love avocados, rounded ripe— or are they a fruit?—
artichokes, asparagus in spring. Better than the B's
you love best: broccoli and beets,
or the C's: cauliflower, carrots, corn, everybody
likes corn.

For the first time we laugh with them
but again and again we have rendered that duet:
two instruments four exulting hands
resounding whole days and nights—

and the fighting— stop, go— deprecating
without wanting to
and that rhapsody: loving. Thinking, I
should be tired of this

like I tire of repeated things: drone voices remembering names duty
dressing driving dusting. Love, I should be
tired of this but each time not. I forget
remember stop go yesterday's gone gone
gone pen all that's left not even that—

but history lives in our bodies, pressing out, your
lips opening finally relaxed, pain not forgotten but
calmed, and something else eager, elemental as the A vegetables

some food we need taste feed feed feed all this greed full
your fingers inside me on me feeling like
water fullness sequences running
down the notes I am ashamed of how good
your hand feels—

watch it so often.

My own hand smaller,
I pet Mickey the Cat showing teeth— kitten
teeth around my thumb but not biting down hard
Mickey upside down on my chest paws under
my chin on your couch me upside down
on your chest alive resonant laughing

about vegetables. I never knew this about
you. That you, too, came from a family that
started with A and B and went to
cauliflower and carrots. Still, we

never get to Z: zucchini—
because we are improvising
whole octaves of history
running through our hands—
we haven't gotten there yet
and I'm glad.

"The Periodic Table of the Vegetables" is a song of the ordinary. Both my lover and I are pianists, and the poem picks up the image of the piano from "Voiceless," through variations of language, riffs on plain old days of love, the interactions of two bodies, skin to skin, the inseparability of the sacred motions of ordinary laughter, fighting, and ease. The poem embodies a participatory immersion in/through/with relational reality, what I have been calling 'health' here, an ongoing improvisation in which, as life exceeds it, categorical grammar begins to fail.

Creativity

Your karma just ran over my dogma.

--Bumper sticker, Berkeley, California

It was an autumn day in Berkeley,
a windy day and clear. Walking beside a church building, I heard
a child crying and saw a tree thriving in narrow dirt
between sidewalk and street: branches dancing
with wind, whipping round and round, each leaf shouting its color,
and underground
those restless reaching roots seeking water, seeking and
finding water, a whole underground river, the flexing joy
of those roots lifting sidewalk, guttercurb, street, even the church steps,
cracking the concrete foundations
of a civilization. I had to look down to keep from tripping.

Creativity's motion runs over, under old dispensations, cracks open
sacred traditions, inviolate creeds-- --whatever insists
we live in the past rather than the other way around.
We have to watch our step.

"Creativity," an excerpt from a much longer poem, advances another attempt to embody excess, what is holy, that which spills beyond institutional habits that would contain it. Spiritual and sexual, a tree root seeking and finding water cracks the concrete steps of a church building. Perhaps a religious tradition is only alive as it continually embodies, performs, practices, and pays attention to that which exceeds and breaks it. Perhaps Christianity only remains Christianity as it actively breaks its own categories, its own sense of complete community. The reference to T.S. Eliot's "old dispensations" at the end of the poem, plays on an echo of other lines from his "Journey of the Magi:" "I had seen birth and death/ But had thought they were different."

The moment of fidelity through attention, the exercise of health, of the participatory reception and extension of reality, is also the moment of rupture, of splaying novelty toward and into the future. In this poem, following Whitehead, I call the dynamism of that moment 'creativity.' I am happy, too, that this poem provides a place to stick the Berkeley bumper sticker epitaph—so it can keep traveling.

Acknowledgments: "Creativity" is excerpted from an 18 page poem, "A Place and a Moment," forthcoming in *God, Literature and Process Thought*, ed. Darren Middleton (London: Ashgate, 2001); "Voiceless," and "The Gaze" appear in slightly different versions in Christina Hutchins, *Collecting Light* (Berkeley: Acacia Books, 1999).

Notes

- ¹ Denise Levertov, *New and Selected Essays*, New York: New Directions, 1992, 69.
- ² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1990, 25.
- ³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: Corrected Edition*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, New York: Free Press, 1978, 23.
- ⁴ Christina Hutchins, "Coming to the Light," in *Authentic Abundance: Twelve Sermons and a Congregation's Response*, (El Cerrito: Mira Vista UCC, 1996), 27-35.
- ⁵ Luce Irigaray, "Another 'Cause' -- Castration," (1974) in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diana Price Herndl, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997, 431.
- ⁶ See Mark 2:23-28, Luke 6:1-5 and Matthew 12:1-14 for the pericope of Jesus and the disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath. See Leviticus 19:10 and Deuteronomy 24:21 for injunctions against gleaning and Exodus 23:12 and Deuteronomy 5:14 for prohibitions against doing so on the Sabbath. Also see Jeremiah 6:9, where the image of gleaning is used to advocate gathering what has been exiled, "Glean thoroughly as a vine the remnant of Israel; like a grape-gatherer, pass your hand again over its branches."
- ⁷ T.S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi," in *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1971, 69. A more

complete excerpt:

*I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods...*

-- T.S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi"

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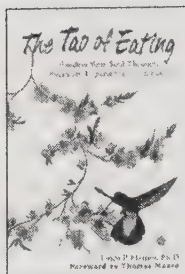
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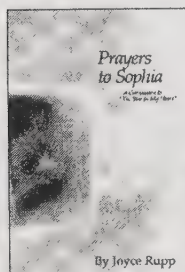


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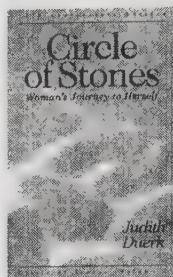
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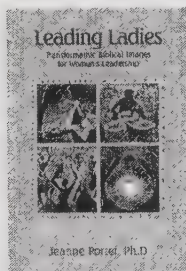
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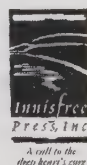
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